



EVERY-DAY SUSAN

MARY-F-LEONARD



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"THE TWO GIRLS STOOD SIDE BY SIDE IN BREATHLESS SILENCE."

EVERYDAY SUSAN

A STORY FOR GIRLS

BY

MARY F. LEONARD

AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF THE BIG FRONT DOOR"

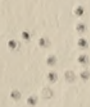
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TO

MY GOD-DAUGHTER

Lucy Gilmer Robinson

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EVERYDAY SUSAN

CHAPTER I

SUSAN MAKES A WISH

O lovely moon, so bright and new,
Shining above me in the blue,
I whisper now my wish to you,
And hope and hope it may come true.

HER Shyness sat in the swinging seat and with her head over her shoulder watched the clouds, rose tinted and violet, which the setting sun had left behind. She wore a blue muslin, with bows to match on her brown braids, and her blue eyes were very serious. Her Shyness was lonely.

As she watched, there appeared, quite without warning, a tiny thread of a new moon just above the spire of St. Mark's. "Here I am," it seemed to say, "and there are you, seeing me over the right shoulder and clear of the maple trees; why not wish for what you want and see if it does not come true?" The chance was too good to be overlooked.

Wishes sometimes come true in a surpris-

ing way, and sometimes they do not. If new moons and right shoulders or left ones, and tree branches, have anything to do with it, it has never been clearly shown what, but it is fun to pretend they have.

Whenever Susan thinks of that eventful winter, she remembers this September evening and how she made her wish, recording it later in the red diary, on the first page of which is inscribed in old English letters: "Thoughts and Adventures of Susan Norris Maxwell." The diary is old and shabby now, then it was brand new. In fact, at the moment she made the wish it had not arrived, but was on the way in Father's pocket.

While she was still gazing at the infant moon, Joe came in the gate. "Well, Susan Hermione, what are you looking so solemn about?" he demanded.

"I wish you wouldn't call me that, Joe," said Susan. "People will think it is really my name, and I have nicknames enough without it."

"Why, it is a delightful name," Joe insisted, sitting on the porch railing and laughing at her.

"It sounds like the heroine of a novel."

"Heroines aren't ever named Susan."

"Aren't they, though? How about Susan Nipper?"

Susan laughed, for she had read "Dombey and Son." "But you can't think of another," she said.

Miss Julia Anderson was responsible for this latest and most absurd name. She had heard Joe call Susan "Hermie," which was short for Hermit, and immediately jumped to the romantic conclusion that her middle name was Hermione. Anybody who thinks this an incredible jump, never knew Miss Julia, who was at this time a fascinating and popular young lady, who lived across the street. She recited beautifully, was deeply read in Shakespeare, and was said to be thinking of the stage. She was also a friend of Joe's.

"You can't think of another," Susan repeated as Joe appeared to be sunk in deep thought.

"How about 'Susie's Six Birthdays'?" he presently asked in triumph.

"Nonsense! A baby book. That doesn't count."

“Well, ‘Susan Sinclair the Sister of Silas,’ then.”

“Now you are making up,” cried Susan, trying not to smile.

“Very well, if you doubt my veracity, I’ll go,” and Joe disappeared within the front door.

Left alone, Susan looked up at the moon again. Seeing her there, her blue ruffles spread out around her, her hands clasped in her lap, one slippered foot touching the floor now and then to keep up a gentle motion, you would never have guessed she was what Joe called a dreadful little goose. But she was, and deep down in her heart she was beginning to realize it, though she had told herself over and over that she couldn’t help it any more than she could the color of her eyes, or the cowlick that was exactly like Joe’s and gave her so much trouble.

Great Aunt Henrietta on Father’s side said Susan should have been spanked,—well spanked years ago. Aunt Emily, who was Mother’s sister, prescribed heart-to-heart talks as better suiting a child of such intelligence. Mother leaned to Aunt Emily’s opinion, but

mother-like always began to make excuses. Susan had never been strong since that illness when she was five, she reminded them.

Father said, "Let her alone. She'll wake up one of these days."

In the end his advice prevailed, and now it seemed the waking up was beginning. Susan was aware of little pricking sensations in her conscience, not unlike those experienced when after a hand or foot has gone to sleep the blood begins to circulate again.

Not Mother even could any longer find excuse in her health, for three winters spent away from home in a more bracing climate had made her well and strong; but absence was responsible for the veil of strangeness that lay over all the old familiar scenes, which had aroused in full force her enemy, and caused her to run away at sight of her old playmates, Bessie May and Lily Boone.

It was too silly. Her Shyness had to own it, but, "Oh, dear, I can't help it," she was saying to herself, when Father and the tea bell combined to change the subject.

Father took from his pocket a package addressed to Susan in the clear, rigid handwrit-

ing of Aunt Henrietta. "Something for you," he said.

A package is a package, even though you may stand in awe of the sender, and Susan carried it into the lighted dining-room where Joe was reading scraps from the evening paper to Mother and Silvy was bringing in the hot biscuit, and opened it in the presence of the family.

"Pshaw!" Joe exclaimed as the red diary came into view. "I call that shabby of Aunt Henrietta, to excite my interest all for nothing."

"Why, Joe, I think it is lovely," cried Susan, fluttering the leaves. "You have to pay as much as fifty cents for a book like this."

"It is a very nice book, I am sure," Mother observed politely, while Joe shouted over the fifty cents,—“but the biscuits are getting cold.”

"I don't see what you are laughing at," said Susan. "Leather backs are expensive."

"It is only that your brother has a soul above half-dollars, my dear," explained Father. "Aunt Henrietta said in her letter,"—taking it out of his breast pocket and handing

it across the table to Mother, "that she thought every girl should keep a diary, so she was sending it. I am glad you like it so much."

"It makes me think of all the things that will happen and all the thoughts I shall have," Susan said, patting the red book and smiling to herself.

"Ah!" said Joe, "so it stands for an adventure into the unknown!"

Susan pondered this as she ate her supper. It gave her an idea. She would name the diary as if it were a real book. When Silvy had carried away the tea things and placed the lamp with a snowy landscape on its shade, in the center of the round table, she got out her blotting pad from the tall secretary and prepared to begin.

Father looked over his paper to say as Mother sat down with her crocheting, "Well, this is like living once more."

Yes, it was nice to be at home again, Susan thought, taking a match from the basket of the bronze fishwoman on the mantel, and lighting it, to burn the oil from her new pen. When Joe came in half an hour or so later,

all spruced up, as Silvy expressed it, Susan had just finished those careful letters still to be seen on the first page of the diary: "Thoughts and Adventures of Susan Norris Maxwell."

"Hermits don't have adventures," he said, reading it over her shoulder. "And do you think you will have thoughts enough to fill it?"

"It seems incredible to you, no doubt," Father remarked behind his paper.

"I'll think something every day, won't I?" asked Susan.

"Are you going out, Joe?" Mother inquired.

"Yes, Mother Kitty, I am going to take the fair Julia to call on some friends from somewhere."

"Mrs. Boone ran in for a few minutes this morning," continued Mrs. Maxwell. "She says Julia is to marry a Chicago man."

"Ah, me! can it be true?" Joe cried, clutching tragically at his heart, and Father remarked he had heard it was a gentleman from Boston.

"Oh—and she said that Margaret Kennedy is to have a little school in the basement of St. Mark's," Mrs. Maxwell went on. "She orig-

inally intended it for children under ten, but Mrs. Boone is trying to induce her to take a few girls of Lily's age. Henry wants to enter Lily at Mrs. Knight's as a boarder, but Mrs. Boone is not willing. She wants Lily with her, and St. Mark's would be so convenient. She wanted me to say I'd send Susan."

"It might be the very thing," Mr. Maxwell observed. Susan shook her head but said nothing.

"I am sorry for Margaret Kennedy," Mrs. Maxwell said. "She has faced all her trouble so bravely, that whatever one thinks of her father, one can feel nothing but admiration and sympathy for her."

"In my opinion Mr. Kennedy was a victim of circumstance. If he had lived he would have succeeded in clearing his name," her husband remarked.

"I have no doubt Miss Kennedy will make a jolly good school-ma'am from what I have heard of her. Good-by, Mother Kitty," and dropping a kiss on her cheek, Joe went off.

Susan returned to her diary, and wrote: "I made a wish on the new moon to-night. I wished for a bosom friend. Mother says it is

superstitious to make wishes on the moon, but Father laughs and says it is because she never had a black mammy. I wonder if it will come true, and if it does, what she will be like?"

It was interesting to wonder what kind of a story those many white pages were destined to tell, she thought, as she stood the diary in a pigeon-hole of the secretary and put up the rolling top. It was a family desk, with bookshelves above and drawers below. Here Mother kept her cook-book and the household ledger, and wrote her weekly letter to Aunt Emily. Here were the church envelopes and the missionary mite box. The bottom drawer and the left-hand pigeon-hole belonged to Susan, and on the shelves above were some of her best book friends.

The dining-room was pleasant, with its big bay window, where Mother's plants flourished in the winter time, its old mahogany, and the tall mantel painted white like the rest of the woodwork, with a jardinière of Canton China at either end, a pair of tall silver candlesticks and the bronze fishwoman, and beneath it the open fireplace and high brass fender.

The town where Susan lived with all the

other people whose names were to appear in the red diary that winter, lies a little below the imaginary line which divides the United States into North and South. Its old inhabitants and their children speak with a soft Southern intonation, and feel a fine scorn for persons who sound their r's too distinctly and do not like hot bread.

"It is so natural," the Brocade Lady said, "to think our own way of doing things is the best."

The Brocade Lady rather liked to take people down, as when Joe Maxwell was one day expressing his pride in his state, she looked over her glasses at him and asked if he thought his state would ever have reason to be proud of him!

The town, which had been for years in a comfortable doze, was beginning to wake and stretch itself at the time this story begins. Some people, who loved peace and quiet, and the good old times, were sorry, others swelled with pride and hastened to have natural gas put in their houses. The old-timers disliked natural gas; they wanted fires you could poke and burn things in. Miss Julia Anderson had

to carry some of her love letters over to the Brocade Lady's sitting-room grate. She could not begin to keep all she received, and the ashman was already overburdened. Not of course with love letters, but other things.

The great awakening which the newspapers talked about under large headlines, very nearly concerned the coming true of Susan's wish, but this of course she did not suspect as she heard Father and Brother Joe discussing it at breakfast.

CHAPTER II

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

A tiny cot in big, big lot,
A cat for company,
Flowers to weed, and books to read,
And cinnamon buns for tea.

Down in the old part of town where Susan lived, there were certain infallible signs by which you could tell Saturday afternoon. The brick walks appeared newly scrubbed and painted; all the steps and curbing on the square gleamed immaculate after a bath of stone dust, and here and there a maid might be seen giving a final polish to bell handles and door knobs. Miss Julia Anderson would be going somewhere, to the *matinée*, or to walk, accompanied by a young man or two, and children of dancing-school age would be passing, the little girls very much curled and happily swinging their slipper bags, the boys lagging behind, unwilling victims. Later, Browinski's wagon would be seen delivering *charlotte russe*, or some other dessert

for to-morrow's dinner, for in these days it was the very good custom not to have such things sent in on Sunday.

All this and more Susan saw from the corner of the porch where she had settled herself with Wynkyns the black cat and the first volume of "The Daisy Chain." It was a perfect afternoon and everybody was off for a good time, so it seemed, but Susan herself.

Mrs. Boone's carriage passed with Bessie and Lily in it, and a vacant seat beside the driver which might have been hers if she had not been so foolish and offish yesterday. While she was thinking about this and wondering where they were going, Sophy Idelle Browinski came up the street. She was the granddaughter of the confectioner, and an old playmate. She was tall and blonde with a Roman tendency to her nose, and to-day she was all a flutter of pink, frills. Susan was moved to make overtures, and went down to the gate.

Sophy Idelle was gracious but hadn't time to stop. She was on her way to a tea. So Susan walked slowly back to her corner and watched Miss Julia set out for the tennis court

accompanied by Joe and Mr. Reynor the poet. Joe seemed in high spirits but the poet looked droopy, perhaps because he wanted Miss Julia all to himself. Certainly she tried to be impartial with her smiles, turning now this way and now that, in a manner which must have been fatiguing, one would think. As they passed she waved her hand airily to Susan.

And now who should come in the gate but the Brocade Lady, carrying a covered dish. Susan kept very still, hoping to escape notice, but the Brocade Lady walked straight towards her corner, with, "Is that Susan? How do you do?"

Susan spilled Wynkyns out of her lap and "The Daisy Chain" on top of him and was dreadfully embarrassed, as she responded.

The Brocade Lady was very odd. She wore full skirts gathered into an infant waist, a style she had adopted years before and still held to, seeing no reason for discarding her handsome and durable gowns because other people wore gores and draperies. They were not all of brocade, but some of them were, and the quaint title which had been bestowed upon her, in consequence, no one knew exactly when or

how, suited her perfectly and did not disturb her in the least.

The Brocade Lady had a cluster of gray curls on each temple, and her eyes were bright and searching. Susan was a little afraid of them and of her blunt way of saying what she thought, regardless of sensitive feelings. She had brought over some cream cheese, she said. She had seen Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell taking the car at the corner, and she wanted to know why Susan was all alone?

It seemed a foolish question, and Susan replied, "I don't know," a favorite phrase of hers, and then carried the cheese in to Silvy.

It was unfortunate that Robin Bright should choose this moment to make a call. When Susan returned he was sitting on the edge of the porch, swinging his legs and talking to the Brocade Lady. Robin, who was the five-year-old son of Mr. Bright, the rector of St. Mark's, was petted by everybody, partly because he had no mother, and also because he was a winning, friendly little soul, not easily resisted. He was an independent spirit, and roamed the neighborhood with perfect freedom. He and his father had come from the

East on the same train with Susan and her mother the other day, and Robin had already made them several visits.

“Hi, Susan!” he called, “Bessie’s mad at you. She says you needn’t *ever* speak to her, if you don’t want to.”

Susan’s face grew red, and the Brocade Lady wanted to know what the trouble was. She ought to have seen that it wasn’t any of her business. Susan stammered dreadfully over her explanation. Bessie was touchy, she said.

“Susan went in the house and wouldn’t speak to her,” Robin volunteered, kicking his heels cheerfully.

“But I didn’t mean—I didn’t know she saw me,” said Susan.

The Brocade Lady evidently understood; Susan’s shyness was no secret. “When I was your age I was diffident just as you are,” she said, “and it spoiled many a pleasant time for me, until one day a friend told me I was selfish. That set me to thinking, and this is what I discovered. The best thing you can be in this world is a friend, and the next best thing to being a friend is having friends, and the

price of friends is friendliness. Do you see? This is all my sermon. If you don't believe you are selfish, look in the dictionary. Good-by," and the Brocade Lady rustled away.

Robin went around the house to see Silvy, who was cleaning silver on the back porch, and Susan was left alone with her indignation. Selfish! she knew she wasn't selfish. She picked up "The Daisy Chain," and Wynkyns came and jumped into her lap again. His golden gaze seemed to ask: "Why mind her? Be selfish and unsociable if you want to. I am."

"It must be so comfortable to be a cat," sighed Susan.

It was perhaps an hour later that she took out her diary and sitting down at the desk made the following entry: "Some day I mean to have a little house in the middle of a big garden, and a Persian cat and a French poodle, and lots of story books, and live all by myself. Then I won't care if people don't like me. I suppose I'll never have any adventures, because you can't if you stay by yourself, so this book has a wrong name."

As she pressed her blotter on the page she

chanced to glance up at the fish woman, who smiled at her cynically. "You needn't look at me in that way!" cried Susan. "If I am, I can't help it."

The fish woman might have asked, "Am what?" but she didn't, she only kept on smiling, and then Susan saw the silver quarter at her feet, and remembered that Mother had put it there for the sponge cakes which she had forgotten to order at Browinski's. Well, here was something to do, anyway.

Putting on her hat at the hall glass, she felt better. Having decided that she could not pay the price of friendship and should never have any adventures to record in the red diary, the decks were cleared, so to speak. At the gate she paused a second to consider which way to go, and then walked on, straight into an adventure.

CHAPTER III

HOLLIDAY

In proverb old, we're often told,
It is the unexpected
Which comes to pass, when we, alas!
Have otherwise elected.

THE pleasantest way to Browinski's led by St. Mark's, where Miss Kennedy was to have her little school, next to which was the Brocade Lady's cottage. On the corner opposite the church was the Seymours', a very grand mansion with a sweeping flight of marble steps and a walled garden. The Seymours were perhaps the most exclusive people in town, and whatever else this did for them, it undoubtedly made them more interesting to outsiders. Distance lends enchantment, and the Seymours were very distant. To-day the storm doors were closed and the shades down; the family had not returned to town. In the glimpses one had of it, the garden looked cool and green. It seemed a pity there was no one about to enjoy it.

In this part of town which had grown up without any planning, or building restrictions, big and little houses dwelt peaceably together, beneath the shade of tall maples and sycamores, and the atmosphere was that of a village rather than a large and growing city. Electric lights were swinging on the corners, but so recently had they come into use that the old lamp-posts were still to be seen here and there, and there were persons who sighed as they remembered that they would never any more see the lamp-lighter going his rounds with his ladder under his arm.

Susan remembered afterwards that there was an express wagon drawn by a big gray horse standing in front of the rectory, while the driver waited at the door, and also that a negro boy passed her, riding one horse and leading another, but she paid no attention to these facts at the time. She was thinking of something else.

Not far beyond the Seymours' on the same street was another house which interested her even more. It too was a stately mansion, with a garden in which there were a fountain and marble statues, representing the seasons. At

present, however, it was not well kept and behind its high fence of elaborate ironwork it had a stern and fortress-like look. A curving flight of stone steps at one side led up to a porch from which four lofty pillars rose to support the projecting roof. Beneath this porch was the basement entrance, with barred windows on either side.

There is something which lends even more enchantment than distance, and this is mystery, and around this house for some years, along with the thickening ivy and untrimmed shrubbery, strange stories had been growing up, until it was now very generally spoken of as the haunted house. These stories had probably originated with the colored servants in the neighborhood. Susan had heard Silvy and Mammy Ria discussing them, but when she began to ask questions Silvy said, shaking her head positively, "No, Miss Susan, I ain't goin' tell you nothin' 't all about it. Miss Kitty done tole me not to."

"Nonsense, Silvy, that was when I was little. Mother doesn't care now. But Mammy will tell me, won't you, Mammy?" Susan begged

in the wheedling tone Mammy was never known to resist.

“ Well, I reckon so, sometime, Honey, but I’s got to travel on now,” and she added, as she picked up her basket, “ You mind what I tells you, Silvy. Don’t you go hangin’ round Christmas Tree House in de night time. Hear me? And don’t talk to me ’bout dey ain’t no ghosts.”

“ Christmas Tree House,” a strangely cheerful name for a haunted house. Why did they call it that? Susan wondered, and was wondering now as she walked slowly by.

She had turned to look back at it, when suddenly with a tremendous clanging the wagon of the fire chief whirled by, turned the corner, and was gone. As Susan paused, the big horse belonging to the express wagon, mad with fright, came galloping towards her, dashing the wagon against a telegraph pole, partly demolishing it and sending its contents far and wide. The nearest gate was that of the haunted house, but better ghosts, even if you believe in them, than frantic horses. As she ran to it, Susan saw a girl standing as if paralyzed with fright in the middle of the walk

right in the path of the first runaway, while from the other direction came the horse the boy had been leading and which had broken loose. Quick as a flash Susan ran to her, grasped her arm and drew her to the gate. The next moment the terrified animal, dragging what was left of the express wagon, swept over the very spot where she had stood.

“My land, little Missy! but that was a close shave!” exclaimed an old colored man who had found the same refuge.

The two girls stood side by side in breathless silence for a few minutes. The shouting men and boys who had sprung from somewhere like magic, and the plunging horses, passed swiftly from sight and hearing, the old darkey limped away in their wake, and all was quiet again. Then Susan’s companion spoke, sitting down on the bottom step of the flight that curved up to the pillared porch.

“I should just have stood there and let them run over me if it had not been for you,” she said, lifting to Susan a lovely, glowing face. Her hair was a warm gold, her eyes a dancing hazel beneath dark lashes. “I was so frightened,” she added.

“ I was frightened, too,” Susan said. “ And you stood there like a block— ”

“ Head,” put in the girl, quickly.

“ Of stone I was going to say,” cried Susan, aghast.

Her companion motioned to the step beside her. “ Anyway, you saved my life,” she said, “ and I am very much obliged to you.”

“ You are perfectly welcome,” Susan replied, accepting the seat and feeling not quite equal to the occasion. “ I am glad I came by just then.”

“ So am I; and as you saved my life I think we ought to be friends, don't you? My name is Holliday Heywood. What is yours? ”

What a joyous name it sounded! Thinking of it, Susan forgot to tell her own till Holliday repeated her question.

“ Mine? ” she said. “ Well, if you're a Holiday I guess I am an Everyday. Everyday Susan Maxwell.” For some strange reason Susan had forgotten her shyness.

Holliday impulsively put her arm around her. “ Oh, I am going to like you! I love you already, because you saved my life and because you are nice and funny.”

Susan slipped her hand into Holliday's and the blue eyes met the hazel straight and true. Susan thought of the red diary and the wish written there, and never for an instant doubted that it had come true. Perhaps she would have told Holliday about it then and there if a strange interruption had not occurred.

A rockaway driven by a grizzled old negro drew up at the curb, and a tall, rather imposing woman got out and approached the gate. She walked with the aid of a long staff, and glanced this way and that in a queer, restless way. When she caught sight of the girls, who had risen, she exclaimed, "What are you doing here, I should like to know? Go away at once. Don't you know they say this house is haunted?"

Susan and Holliday didn't wait for a second bidding. Hand in hand they flew down the street, not pausing till they came within view of Browinski's cheerful windows.

"Did you ever?" cried Holliday, breathlessly.

"No, I never," Susan replied, laughing. "It must have been Mrs. Carrol, the old lady who lives there," she added.

“And is the house really haunted?” asked Holliday.

Susan hesitated. “I don’t suppose it is *really*, but there is something queer about it. Mammy Ria says it is.”

“This has been the most romantic and interesting afternoon, hasn’t it? Two adventures!” exclaimed Holliday, and her bright eyes seemed to ask, “What next?”

Susan remembered her sponge cakes. “I have to go to Browinski’s,” she said, and as her companion seemed to have no other thought than to accompany her, they crossed the street together.

Browinski’s was an alluring place. The windows presented a varied display of good things, and inside the same story was continued on a more elaborate scale. As a little child Susan had the impression that the marble halls referred to in “I dreamed that I dwelt—” were Browinski’s. The floor with its big squares of black and white, the counters and glittering showcases, made it a sort of wonderland to her, and it was with a touch of awe that she saw Sophy Idelle making herself at home amid all this splendor, even to

invading the lace-veiled precincts of the ice-cream parlor. Although since then her ideas had broadened, she still felt the charm of Browinski's.

While the cakes were being put up, Holliday took out a little purse of blue leather with her monogram in silver on it, and bought twenty-five cents' worth of chocolate caramels. This seemed to Susan a good deal to spend at one time on candy, and she wondered if Holliday was rich. Everything about her was dainty and fine, from the tips of her bronze toes to the rim of her leghorn hat.

When Miss Carry handed the caramels across the counter, Holliday held the package out to Susan. "You must take them," she said. "I bought them for you. I shall be offended if you don't. You saved my life, you know." There was a bit of a twinkle in her eyes, but she did not smile as she put her hands behind her, refusing to take it back.

"Why, there's my father!" she exclaimed the next moment, and Susan, looking towards the door, saw a victoria just then stopping at the curb, in which a lady and a gentleman were seated.

“I told papa I’d be on the corner by the church, and our adventure made me forget. I must go. Good-by. Remember we are going to be friends. And I want you to have this.” Pressing something into Susan’s hand, Holliday was off like a rocket, and before Susan had time to take a deep breath the victoria was driving away with her.

The family were on the porch when she reached home.

“Hello!” called Joe. “Why, you look—waked up.”

Susan sat down beside him on the swinging seat. “I have seen the loveliest girl in the world,” she announced. “I saved her life,—at least, I guess I did.” She held out the bag to Joe.

“Is she in here?” Joe asked, eying the bag in pretended doubt. “Ah, excuse me,—caramels!” taking several. “Do I understand that you are in doubt whether this loveliest girl is alive or not?”

“Don’t be so silly, Joe. Yes, Mother, she really is. I wish you could see her,” and Susan went on to relate the adventure. Father looked over his paper and listened, too.

"It was very brave of you, dearie," Mother cried. "You might have been killed yourself. It makes me shudder."

"Susan Hermione is living up to her name. She is a heroine," said Joe.

"No, I am not. I didn't think at all till afterwards. Then I was frightened," Susan replied. "And she gave me the caramels and this," she added, holding up a ring with a red stone in it.

"The caramels are genuine," said Joe, "but this probably came out of a prize package of popcorn."

Father held out his hand. "Let me have it." He scrutinized it carefully, holding it up to the light, and finally taking from his pocket a magnifying glass. "It is a pretty old-fashioned setting," he remarked presently, "and if I am not mistaken this is a very fine ruby."

Joe whistled. "Well, Your Shyness, I congratulate you."

"But, Susan, you can't keep it," cried Mother. "You must return it at once."

Then it transpired that Susan had not the least idea in the world where her new friend was to be found. "You see, Mother, it all

happened so quickly we hadn't time to say much. And it is funny, but I felt as if I had known her always. Then—oh, I forgot to tell you about the haunted house."

"I wouldn't call it the haunted house, dear," Mother said when the second adventure had been related. "We don't believe in ghosts or anything so silly."

"There is something queer about the place, Mother Kitty," Joe said. "Did you ever hear about the spectral Christmas tree? The darkeys call it Christmas Tree House."

"No, I don't care for such foolish stories," Mrs. Maxwell answered, untying her bonnet strings. "I think supper must be ready."

"Tell me about it, Joe," Susan begged—"why do they call it that?"

"Not now. Mother Kitty doesn't approve of ghost stories, and there's the bell. You get mammy to tell you. She has seen the tree."

CHAPTER IV

PLANS

You tell to me, and I to you,
Great things we fondly hope to do
 Some day,
And of these plans so fair to view,
Some come to pass, but most fall through,
 Some way.

OVER their soda water at Browinski's Susan and Joe were having a confidential chat.

“ You see,” Joe said, “ I have been costing a lot of money all these years at college, and I think it is time I was making a little. That is why I am going into the bank instead of to the Law School, but I’ll tell you something if you will keep it dark. I am going to read law at night, and surprise Father one of these days.”

“Are you really, Joe? But won’t it be very hard after working all day?” asked Susan.

“ Oh, of course it will, rather, but I have made up my mind to buckle down this winter, Your Shyness, and be a credit to the family.”

There was not the least doubt of him in

Susan's blue eyes. "Joe, that will be splendid," she exclaimed, and they clinked their glasses and drank to the success of his plans!

Joe had hosts of friends. Everybody liked him and was ready to oblige him, so that he had easily secured a place for which there were a dozen other applicants. His father had seemed both pleased and doubtful. It would be all right in case Joe did not allow his love of pleasure to interfere with his work, he said.

Privately Susan thought Father a little hard on Joe, who was, in her opinion, the best brother in the world. Joe sometimes said that half a good-for-nothing brother was better than a whole one, but Susan, who didn't like to be reminded that he was a half brother, resented this.

Joe's mother had died when he was a baby and for seven or eight years he had been spoiled by an indulgent grandmother before he fell into the hands of Mother Kitty, as he called her. Perhaps she had continued the spoiling. She was only a dozen years older than he, and there were ten years between him and Susan.

Several days had passed since that eventful Saturday afternoon, and without a word or glimpse of her new friend. As she finished her soda water Susan thought how delightful it would be if Holliday should come walking in at the door from which she had disappeared so suddenly. Nothing of the kind happened, however. Except for the ruby ring locked away in Mother's jewel box, there was nothing to refute Joe's opinion, borrowed from Betsy Prig, that there was no such a person. Her adventure had come to seem almost like a dream.

Holliday Heywood was such a sky-rockety name, Joe declared, that he thought Susan must have made it up.

"It is strange she did not tell you where she lived," Mother had said at least a dozen times.

"But I didn't tell her where I lived," was Susan's answer.

"Then you were a pair of geese; that's all."

Father searched the directory, but there were no Heywoods who answered the requirements. "They are probably new people," he said. "I used to know everybody worth

knowing in town, but times have changed."

Joe suggested advertising, and proceeded to invent all sorts of absurd "Wanted." "—To find the loveliest girl in the world, with brown—no, golden hair, and gray—no, brown eyes," which was the way Susan's description ran, he insisted.

"Never mind, your friend will reappear sometime," Father said reassuringly.

Mother added, "I trust she will, to get her ring. But Susan must remember that we know nothing in the world about her. You cannot jump into friendship without any previous acquaintance."

"You must 'look before you ere you leap,'" Joe quoted. "But Susan didn't jump, she just fell in," he added.

Susan nodded. "And oh, Mother, if you could only see her you'd understand," she cried.

"Mother Kitty is from Philadelphia," Joe explained. "She can't help being exclusive." He loved to tease Mother about being a Philadelphian.

To return to Browinski's: "And now if you have finished, we will go and look at law

books," Joe said. "That is, unless you prefer to stay and dream awhile."

Susan waked up from her brown study over Holliday, and laughed. "Are you going to try at Self and Son's?" she asked, slipping off the stool.

"Now you are a thrifty lass, Susan Hermione. I hadn't thought of it, but perhaps we might as well, as I am starting in to be economical. On the strength of it, what do you say to sampling those chocolates?"

This was just like Joe. Susan tried to point out that the Selfs might not have what he wanted, but she spoke only half-heartedly, for she was fond of chocolates, too.

Self and Son's was a second-hand book shop, and in Susan's opinion one of the interesting spots of the neighborhood. From the looks of the place it might have been fourth or fifth hand at least, so decrepit and dingy was it. The floor was a step down from the street, and when you entered a clanging bell brought Himself or Herself, as Joe called them, from somewhere in the dim background, and aroused a sleepy parrot in his cage near the dusty window. The air was full of a musty odor that

made you cough, and was perhaps responsible for the extreme hoarseness of Polly's croak. Himself was usually attired in a flapping dressing gown with gray mits on his rheumatic hands, and his hooked nose and glassy eyes made him look like a near relative of the parrot, Susan thought. She was half afraid of him and preferred Herself, a mere scrap of a person, done up in a woolen fascinator,—for she also was rheumatic,—who called you dearie or honey and thanked you kindly for your purchase if you made one. Except in the rusty sign there was no evidence of "Son."

Besides old books, the Selves dealt in pens, pencils, tablets, and copy books and were much patronized by the children, more on account of old Look-in-a-Book, as they called the parrot, than the excellence of their wares. He was a gray African parrot, and his scarlet tail feathers were much coveted for dolls' hats.

To-day, the weather being balmy as June, Himself, clad in an ancient frock coat, sat in a chair outside the door when Susan and Joe approached. "Law books? Yes, sir, I'll show you what I have. Here lately we've got in quite a stock. There's a right smart de-

mand for law books." Mr. Self hobbled before them into the shop, where his wife was making matters worse with a feather duster.

Susan stopped at the parrot's cage, but the bird eyed her sullenly and would not respond to her coaxing "Pretty Polly! nice Polly!"

The rows and rows of shabby books fascinated her. She liked to lift their worn covers and read the title-page, and sometimes the name of the former owner, and as Polly proved obdurate, she turned to these for amusement. The first book she peeped into was, "Lives of the Lord Chancellors," and on the fly leaf was written "W. H. Kennedy." She paused to think where she had heard this name recently.

"Aren't you going to school, dearie? Don't you want some tablets and pencils?" asked Mrs. Self. "We've got a nice stock."

Susan replied that she didn't need any, but the mention of school reminded her where she had heard the name Kennedy, and just then she heard Himself saying to Joe, "Yes, sir, we got quite a lot from the Kennedy library. The best of the sets was sold at auction, but we got a number."

“Look in a book, look in a book,” screamed the parrot, suddenly thinking better of his silence. Then he turned himself upside down and hanging from the top of his cage winked at Susan, adding, “You’ll find it.” These were the only words except “Oh, pshaw!” that he was ever heard to utter.

As they left the shop followed by a rapid fire of entreaties to look in a book, Susan asked, “Joe, why did Mr. Kennedy have to sell his books?”

“Mr. Kennedy is dead. He didn’t sell them. They had to be sold.”

“Wasn’t he Miss Kennedy’s father? I wonder why she didn’t keep them?”

“Well, you see Mr. Kennedy lost all his money and some other people’s too, and everything had to be sold to satisfy his creditors.”

“Do you know Miss Kennedy, Joe?” Susan inquired.

“No, that is I haven’t seen her for years and years, but I think I once went to school with her, when I was a little shaver. At Miss Polly King’s. They called her Peggy, then.”

“Did you really, Joe?” Susan cried.
“Then she is rather a young lady?”

“She was when I knew her. She wore a pink sunbonnet if I am not mistaken.”

Joe left Susan at the corner, remembering something he wanted down town, and she walked on alone thinking of Miss Kennedy in the new light so unexpectedly cast upon her. The fact that she had worn a pink sunbonnet and been called Peggy made her less alarming, less like Miss Alma Bell, to whom Susan had once gone to school for a few weeks. Miss Alma was now Sophy Idelle's teacher in the public school. She wore spectacles and looked as if the cat had licked her, Silvy said. Susan's experience with teachers was very small, but she had an absurd fear of them. Miss Kennedy couldn't be a cut-and-dried teacher like Miss Alma, however, this was certain.

Susan had a way of becoming engrossed in her thoughts. With her eyes on the pavement she was deciding that it wasn't possible Miss Alma had ever worn a pink sunbonnet, when she was startled by a voice close by saying, “I beg your pardon, but can you tell me where Mrs. Maxwell lives?”

Voices count for a great deal, and this was a particularly sweet one. Before she could

lift her eyes Susan knew it belonged to a lady, —a real one. And a very charming one, the face she looked into seemed to assure her, the next moment. Her Shyness grew very rosy, as she always did when spoken to by a stranger, but she managed to say that she was Susan Maxwell and lived a few doors farther on.

The lady, who was slight and fair and dressed in black, held out her hand with an entrancing smile,—Susan felt it so. “Oh, are you? I am Miss Kennedy, and I am on my way to ask your mother to let me have you in my class.”

Peggy and the pink sunbonnet were somehow in that smile; or something at any rate which in a mysterious way came at once in touch with the real Susan, back of the shyness and stiffness. What was said in the few steps that lay between them and the gate, she could not have told. She only knew Miss Margaret was lovely, and she was glad she was going to school to her.

She flew upstairs in a gale of happiness to tell Mother. “She is the darlingest person you ever saw, not a bit like a teacher!” she exclaimed.

Mother remarked as she quietly laid aside her sewing, that Susan's experience with teachers was hardly large enough to warrant the prejudice she had against them. When Mother said things like this Joe called it "putting on her Philadelphia manners." As if good manners were not the same the country over, Mrs. Maxwell would retort.

Naturally enough, Miss Kennedy was the chief topic of conversation at the supper table. Susan wished to know how Mr. Kennedy happened to lose other people's money as well as his own.

"I don't think he did," Mr. Maxwell answered.

"How about the Carrol estate?" asked his wife.

"Well, there is only Mrs. Carrol's word against his." Then in response to Susan's questioning eyes, Mr. Maxwell added, "You see Mr. Kennedy acted as trustee for Mrs. Carrol after her husband's death, and she claims now that certain bonds, valued at something like twenty thousand dollars, were unaccounted for. Mr. Kennedy said that the bonds had been returned to her and that he had her

receipt for them. The receipt, however, could not be found at the time, nor has it come to light since his death, which occurred soon after the trouble."

"And the bonds are still missing, aren't they?" asked Joe.

"I believe so, but I fully expect them to turn up one of these days,—or the receipt. Mr. Kennedy was the soul of honor, and Mrs. Carrol is, I am inclined to think, hardly responsible."

"Mrs. Boone says Margaret's firm hope is that she may be able to clear her father's name," said Mrs. Maxwell. "I trust she may, poor girl."

"Is it the Mrs. Carrol who lives in Christmas Tree House?" inquired Susan. "Well, I think she is rather crazy, and I don't believe for a minute Miss Margaret's father took her bonds."

"Much you know about it," said Mother, laughing at her positive tone.

That night Susan wrote in her diary: "Miss Margaret Kennedy is lovely. I am going to school to her." Then she added, "I haven't found Holliday yet. I wonder if I ever

shall?" Later on she fell into verse and wrote:—

“Of all the girls I ever met
She was the most beguiling,
Alas! when shall I see her face
All radiant and smiling?”

She felt rather proud of this, particularly “beguiling,” a word she had never used before.

CHAPTER V

MISS MARGARET'S SCHOOL

The clock tells the quarter,
"Click" goes the gate;
School begins in our town
At half-past eight.

SOPHY IDELLE BROWINSKI declared it couldn't be much of a school, anyhow, and in point of numbers it was not; but when you came to quality, that was another matter. Sophy Idelle didn't know everything. Her experience was limited to what Susan called a cut-and-dried teacher and a square room with blackboards and maps.

Miss Margaret was a charmer and simply bewitched her pupils into liking to study, Joe Maxwell said. This was partly true and partly nonsense. She was really a born teacher, full of vivid interest in all sorts of things,—not only books, and possessed the gift of inspiring others with a like interest, and she was charming.

Joe took great pains to meet Miss Kennedy,

and then on the score of those sunbonnet days to establish himself on the footing of an old friend. It was not easy, for since her trouble Margaret had held proudly aloof; but Joe was very persistent, when he put his mind upon anything, and had a friendly way of his own not easy to withstand.

As to school-rooms, Miss Kennedy's was the queerest imaginable. It was a basement room, long and low, with many queer angles, running across the church where the transepts widened it. At one end a glass door and two deep windows opened upon the grassy churchyard. You went down a step or two when you entered, and the broad window sills were almost on a level with the grass outside. The effect of this when one sat in the window was indescribably pleasant. It was like being both outside and in, at the same time.

The room stretched away into twilight at the other end, where the windows looked out upon the rectory walls, so near you could touch them. Here the janitor stored chairs and benches not in use, and unwittingly provided an excellent place for "I spy."

In the inside wall were two swinging doors

of green leather through which an explorer who was not careful was liable to be suddenly precipitated down four or five carpeted steps into the Sunday School room; but the strangest thing of all was the large flat stone in the floor, near the middle, where the shadows began. A wooden rail protected the stone, on which was inscribed:

IN MEMORY OF WILLIAM WOODSON

FOR TWENTY YEARS RECTOR OF ST. MARK'S

"A Wise Man Who Built his House upon a Rock"

The school-room proper was in the sunny front end. Here Miss Kennedy had placed a small case of books, and hung some pictures on the plain white walls. A Persian-looking cover on her table, and a few plants, gave a touch of color. The floor had only strips of cocoa matting on it, but when the sunshine lay there in golden patches, no need was felt for anything better. The desks, which were of a simple movable kind, were grouped about as seemed convenient.

But Susan as yet had not made the acquaintance of this queer school-room, and not even

the delightful discovery in regard to Miss Margaret could keep her from dreading that first day.

“Now, Susan Hermione, don’t be a goose. Suppose you were going to the bank to be bossed by Colonel Brand, instead of to a nice little school with Miss Kennedy at the head of it,” said Joe, that Monday morning.

It was impossible for Susan to believe that Joe’s ordeal was anything like so trying as her own, as he went off whistling gayly. “Oh, Wynn,” she said, her cheek pressed against his glossy side, “I wish I were a cat. I hear your heart beating. Is it beating with sympathy for me?”

Wynkyns opened his mouth in a very wide yawn, displaying a fine set of teeth and a pink tongue, then he deliberately turned his back and began to wash his white tie with his ears flattened down in an absurd way.

“Well, you do look silly!” Susan exclaimed. “And you needn’t be so superior. You wouldn’t like it if you had to go to a perfectly strange school where you know only two girls, and one of them is mad at you and the other is her intimate friend.”

Susan had been honestly trying not to be a goose, and more than anything else the thought of Holliday influenced her. The definition of "selfish" in the dictionary was: "Chiefly or wholly regarding self." She had looked it up, secretly hoping to be able to contradict the Brocade Lady, but she couldn't help seeing that the reason she had not been shy with Holliday was because she had not thought about herself. She had done a friendly act without thinking about it, and had won a friend,—that is, if she ever saw her again.

As a first step in ignoring her troublesome self, Susan went over to explain to Bessie that she had not meant to be rude. This required some courage, for the Manns were a tremendous family, of all ages, sizes and varieties, from Grandfather down to the baby, and somebody was sure to be on the porch to watch her come up the walk; but she went, only to find that Bessie was spending several days in the country with Lily Boone. "Having a lovely time," Miss Geraldine said. Susan went home with nothing but a clear conscience to show for it, but that was a great deal.

It was a delicious October morning when

Susan set out for school. Mother was going to market and would go with her as far as the gate. When they came within sight of St. Mark's, Susan began to lag a little.

"I think I see Lily," Mrs. Maxwell said, "and isn't that Bessie with plaid ribbons?—and there is Robin Bright."

They stood in a group at the gate, and beyond Lily another head was visible. Perhaps it might be Miss Arthur's niece, Mother was suggesting, when the gate swung open and a radiant butterfly of a girl flew to meet them.

"Oh, Everyday Susan," she cried, "I am so glad to see you. I knew you were coming. Aren't you surprised?"

Susan's delight couldn't find words in which to express itself. "Mother, this is Holliday," she said, holding fast the hand of her friend, as if she feared she might vanish again.

"So I guessed," Mrs. Maxwell answered, smiling, and Holliday shook hands, making a quaint little backward courtesy.

"Susan and I are going to be friends always, Mrs. Maxwell, because she saved my life," she explained.

Lily and Bessie came to meet them, wonder-

ing how Holliday happened to know Susan. If Bessie had meant to be snubby, she thought better of it, and told Susan she was sorry she wasn't at home the day she came over.

Hand in hand with Holliday, Susan felt she could face anything, but there was really nothing to face. Holliday had been to Cincinnati with her aunt, she said, and then as they all walked together up the long path she told how she and Susan had met. "She is my first and best friend in this city," she concluded, and Susan felt very proud.

The other two were much impressed. It was clear that Holliday was a leader; even Bessie, whose small black eyes and firm lips proclaimed her love of managing, surrendered for the present, while Lily hung upon her admiringly.

Joe called Lily the angel child. She had a round baby face, big blue eyes, and a small, puckered mouth, and her blonde curls were the most perfect imaginable, smooth and long and each quite distinct from the rest. Holliday's hair was a mass of sunny ripple which declined to conform to any curling stick. Lily had a vague mind, and was always getting things

twisted, but in spite of a doting grandmother who did all she could to spoil her, there was no harm in Lily.

A tall, handsomely dressed lady passed them on her way out. Miss Kennedy, who was waiting at the door, said it was Miss Arthur who had brought her niece to join the class. Aline was a stranger and diffident, and she asked them to be particularly cordial to her.

"I am a stranger too, Miss Margaret," said Holliday, laughing. "Mustn't they be particularly nice to me?"

Miss Kennedy smiled, and said she doubted if Holliday was ever a stranger anywhere for more than ten minutes. Then they all went together into the school-room with its queer angles and its gravestone.

The six infants, as Miss Kennedy called her youngest pupils, were already employed, seated in small chairs around a table, kindergarten fashion, with Robin Bright as self-appointed master of ceremonies, and at one of the desks, leaning her elbow on it and looking rather sullen, was Aline Arthur. She was sallow and dark, and her black dress was unbecoming. It was for her father, Bessie whispered. There

was nothing about her to suggest that she belonged to her handsome aunt.

She did not seem exactly shy, Susan thought, as Miss Margaret introduced them, but quite indifferent and uninterested, and so she remained. They tried to be friendly because Miss Margaret had asked it, but their efforts made little impression.

It was while the younger children were being dismissed, that the others, who were to receive some final instructions about their new books, grouped themselves in one of the windows. Aline upon invitation joined them in a reluctant fashion.

"Let's tell about ourselves," Holliday suggested, "then we shall feel better acquainted. I'll begin. I am from New Orleans, and I am nearly thirteen. Papa has gone into business here, and we are going to housekeeping as soon as we can find a house."

"Your mother's dead, isn't she?" asked Lily.

"Yes," Holliday answered and a shadow fell over her brightness, for a minute, but it quickly passed and she was all animation again, telling about her winter in Paris with Aunt

Nan. "That is the longest journey I ever took," she added with some complacency. "Now you, Bessie."

"Well," began Bessie, laughing, "I have more brothers and sisters than any of you,—four of one and five of the other. My father is a doctor, and I have been to New York once."

"I have a father and mother, and a brother and sister," said Lily, twisting one of her long curls, "but I stay with Grandma most of the time. My father is going to be *cashmere* of the new bank."

"Cashmere? What's that?" asked Aline sharply.

"She means cashier," exclaimed Bessie.

"I don't care," said Lily, while the others laughed.

"Now you, Aline," said Holliday.

"I don't care to talk about myself," was the blunt reply.

It was such a surprise that for a moment no one thought of a suitable retort, and then Miss Margaret called to Aline that her aunt had come for her.

"That is what you get for trying to be nice

to her," exclaimed Bessie, as Aline left them.

Except for this incident the first day was without a cloud. Holliday and Susan, walking home together, agreed that Miss Margaret was the dearest teacher in the world. A tall mulatto woman, with big gold hoops in her ears, came for Holliday, who called her Gertie.

Susan hated to mention the ring for fear Holliday would be offended, but she knew she must. When with much hesitation she began her explanation, it quickly became evident that Holliday was relieved.

"I am going to give you another, Susan," she said. "Aunt Nan was very cross about it. She said it was an heirloom."

That afternoon Mrs. Boone ran in to ask how Susan liked school, and sat on the porch and talked for a long time. She was a very cheerful lady, but outside the house she always wore a floating crêpe veil. It seemed it was she who asked Mr. Heywood to send his daughter to Miss Kennedy. She knew all about the Heywoods. They were the nicest sort of people, she assured Mrs. Maxwell. Mr. Heywood was talking of taking the Matthews house for the winter.

Joe came in to dinner, announcing that he had discovered who the Heywoods were.

"So have the rest of us," said Mother.

"Is Mr. Heywood very rich?" Susan asked.

"I don't know about that. He is big man in the new steel works."

"Susan, why do you ask?" inquired Mother. "It doesn't make any difference in Holliday, whether she is rich or not."

"Well," said Susan, "Holliday has lovely clothes, and it is interesting to be rich."

"You bet it is," cried Joe.

"But I do object to having the emphasis put on money," said Mother. "As if it were the most important thing."

"You must find out about her great-grandfather, Susan. That is the thing," remarked Joe.

"Mother doesn't mean that either," said Susan. "It is Holliday herself, isn't it, Mother?"

CHAPTER VI

THE BROCADE LADY

Day in, day out, we're sure to find
The chiefest thing is being kind.

THE Brocade Lady's house was one of the oldest residences in the town. For many years after her marriage she had lived in the North, but since the death of her husband she had come back and settled down in the home of her girlhood, just then opportunely left vacant.

It was a roomy brick cottage with basement and attic. A flight of wooden steps led up to the front door, which was in a bay with a window on either side of it and opened into a wide hall which divided the house in two.

The Brocade Lady did not care for the decorations which were at this time so popular. Her home was conspicuously lacking in tidies and throws, scarfs and lambrequins, painted tiles and banners. Some good old-fashioned furniture, a few dignified steel engravings, portraits of her mother and father, many solid-

looking books in the tall cases, the *Living Age* and *Harper's Monthly* in the magazine racks on the table,—this was her sitting-room. In the hall a grandfather's clock ticked "*Virtue is its own reward*," or so Joe Maxwell said. For some reason the Brocade Lady was not an admirer of Mr. Joseph Maxwell, as she always called him; but Joe, who was quite aware of it, only laughed.

The Brocade Lady didn't mind her own business,—that is, exclusively. She did not pretend to, but owned to a healthy curiosity in other people's affairs. She was blunt, and those who had over-sensitive feelings found it wise to avoid her, just as the neuralgic avoid draughts; but happy are they who can stand fresh air and plain speaking. She was a sort of general friend in need. She visited the hospitals, worked among the poor, and helped nurse the sick, and yet with it all she lived a somewhat lonely life, in her roomy cottage.

Seeing Margaret Kennedy going to and fro set her to thinking. She was attracted by her youth and grace and the courage with which she was facing the sad reverses that had descended so suddenly upon her. Some people

said Margaret had made a great mistake in not accepting the home offered her by her uncle Mr. Seymour, but the Brocade Lady, knowing something of Mr. Seymour, was not so sure. There had been little cordiality between him and his brother-in-law, and he seemed to regard the matter of the lost bonds as a personal grievance, accepting the general belief that they had been involved in the loss of Mr. Kennedy's own fortune. How could Margaret, loving and honoring her father as she did, and feeling so deeply the suspicion cast upon his integrity, become dependent upon her uncle? No, the Brocade Lady liked her spirit.

From a window overlooking the churchyard, she watched and considered and laid her plans. Others remarked how pale and thin Margaret was growing, and said "What a pity!" The Brocade Lady investigated her boarding place and decided it would not do. And so it happened that one day she met Margaret, with whom she had slight acquaintance, and stopping her, said as she drew from her bag a scrap of paper, "I have been trying to write an advertisement and as I never did such a

thing before, I am in doubt how to word it."

Margaret took the paper held out to her, and the Brocade Lady continued, "I have been thinking for some time that I should like to have some one in the house with me. Anne goes home at night. I live simply, but well enough, and in consideration of their company I should ask only a moderate board. But then I don't want just anybody. Now how can I possibly say all that in an advertisement?"

Margaret laughed. "I don't think you can," she answered. Then, looking down at the paper and up at the Brocade Lady, and with some hesitation, she added, "Do you really want a boarder?"

"If I can find the right person. You don't happen to know of any one? Now if you yourself were not settled—" The schemer trembled at her own daring.

"Would you really take me?" Margaret cried, and the thing was done. The Brocade Lady had landed her fish and the price of an advertisement was saved, she afterwards pointed out gleefully. As Margaret expressed it, she was taken in, in every sense of

the word. It did not take her long to see through the little ruse, but she could not resent it, and instead set about making herself indispensable to this kind friend who really did need a companion.

It was like heaven after what she had endured for a year in the dingy boarding house. Margaret took heart and unpacked certain little treasures of her own, making of the corner room with its dormer windows and chimney cupboards a quaint and charming place, altogether unlike the rest of the house.

The Brocade Lady looked on happily, smiling to see the soft color returning to Margaret's face. It was pleasant to have some one to read aloud to her in the evenings, when her eyes were tired, and though she laughed when Margaret reminded her to wear her overshoes, she liked it.

Margaret would have said she had very few friends, but certainly there were more callers at the Brocade Lady's after she was installed, than before. Two parishioners under one roof seemed to demand more frequent visits from Mr. Bright, for instance. Then there were Joe Maxwell, and Julia Anderson, who to

quote her own words was perfectly devoted to Margaret.

A rather frequent caller at the Brocade Lady's at this time was Colonel Brand, the president of what was known to Susan as Joe's bank, and of many other things besides. He was not a friend of Miss Kennedy's, and betrayed his surprise at finding her established in the sitting-room when he entered one evening.

The Brocade Lady was one of the few persons in town who knew him well. Mr. Seymour had introduced him into high financial circles, where he had been winced and dined as a wealthy man on the lookout for investments should be, and the general opinion was that outside of business he was stiff and unapproachable.

The Brocade Lady said he was diffident, but this was hard to believe. She had first known Sidney Brand in his boyhood and felt a deep regard for him. He had been very kind to her, she said.

It was known that Colonel Brand was interesting himself in Mrs. Carrol's behalf, and that he scouted the idea that the lost bonds

had ever been returned to her. He was quite testy over the matter with the Brocade Lady, who warmly espoused Mr. Kennedy's side. There was a deplorable laxity in affairs of trust, he declared. Too much risking of other people's money.

"You'll find out some day, Sidney, that Mrs. Carrol is not wholly to be relied upon," she insisted.

"I own she is peculiar, but nothing more," he responded. "She has been greatly annoyed by the silly stories concerning her house, and is naturally depressed by all the trouble she has had."

"I should like to know what started that tale about the tree," said the Brocade Lady. "I was questioning Nancy the other day. She claims to know several persons who have seen it. It strikes me, on the whole, as rather picturesque."

"But if it were your house, my dear madam—"

The Brocade Lady laughed. "It might be annoying, in that case," she acknowledged.

It was plain that Miss Kennedy did not like Colonel Brand. Of course she was not pres-

ent when Mrs. Carrol's affairs were under discussion, but in some way she divined his opinion of her father and was hurt by it.

The Brocade Lady could hardly have felt more interest in the little school if it had been her own, and the attention lavished upon Margaret by her adoring pupils pleased her greatly. Few days passed without some sort of an offering.

"Lily seems to think you don't have anything to eat over at your house," Mrs. Boone told the Brocade Lady. "Whenever we have anything she particularly likes she insists on taking some to Miss Kennedy."

Robin Bright became a devoted satellite, dropping in at all hours, and making himself perfectly at home, and if Miss Margaret felt inclined for a walk she had a choice of half a dozen companions. Daily contact with these merry young things was the best medicine her sad spirit could have. In helping them solve their small everyday problems, her own greater ones began to look less dark.

In the Brocade Lady's own room was an illuminated text:

"After winter followeth summer; after the

night the day returneth, and after a tempest a great calm.”

With a new hope springing up in her heart Margaret copied it and hung it over her desk, beneath her father's picture.

CHAPTER VII

THE WISE MAN

“Like a wise man, who built a house, and digged deep and laid his foundation upon a rock.”

“WE can’t possibly tell her our secrets, Susan. I really think that would be casting pearls before swine.”

Susan laughed. Holliday said such funny things. “I’m afraid Aline wouldn’t like to be called swine,” she said, “but of course we couldn’t—show her our diaries, for instance.”

“I should rather think not,” Holliday cried. “No, there are some things we are not going to tell anybody, but we can try to be nice to Aline for Miss Margaret’s sake.”

They were walking home from school together. By going a square out of her way Susan could walk home with Holliday, who then, to make things even, walked a square farther with her.

Susan had never before been so happy. Her shyness was almost forgotten when she was with Holliday, and her pleasures were more

than doubled now she had some one to share them. Joe found no reason in these days to call her Hermit, and in the red diary she had crossed out the wish about living alone with a Persian cat and a French poodle. Holliday had cast these interesting beasts in the shade.

Theirs was a friendship founded upon the attraction of opposites, for Holliday was sociable, self-possessed, sparkling, while Susan was shy, sensitive and very much of a mouse. Everyday and Holliday very well described them. It was written in the stars, the Brocade Lady said, that where Holliday went there would be music and applause and for Susan a quiet corner.

Susan, who heard her say this, was a little depressed by it. Music and applause seemed more desirable than corners. Yet she was always choosing the corner for herself. This was what the Brocade Lady meant by "written in the stars."

Holliday begged so hard to be allowed to give Susan a ring, that Mrs. Maxwell at length reluctantly consented, though not before Mr. Heywood had put in his plea. Holliday's father was a fine-looking, genial

person, much inclined to allow his only child her own way when possible.

“Holliday is a romantic little puss,” he explained, “and nothing will do but she must give Susan a ring in memory of their first meeting. She is going to buy it with her own pocket money; so, my dear madam, do not spoil a little girl’s pleasure by any foolish scruples.”

“It must be a very simple one,” Mrs. Maxwell stipulated, and so it was, but “darling,” Susan said, with her initials and the date engraved inside. In return she gave Holliday a tiny gold locket with a band of blue enamel on it, one that belonged to herself; and they were very happy over the exchange.

Holliday declared the verse Susan had written about her was as good as Longfellow, and after seeing Susan’s, she immediately set up a red diary of her own.

Mr. Heywood took a house on North Street not far from Christmas Tree House, and Susan thought the easy, careless way in which life moved on there very pleasant indeed. Mother said Mrs. McKoy, the housekeeper, must be a remarkable person not to mind about the irregular meals, and never knowing how

many to prepare for. Mrs. McKoy was very kind to Holliday, but it was plain at times, even to Susan, that more authority would have been better. Holliday was in the main a good child, surprisingly unspoiled when you took into account her great popularity, but she had her willful moments.

She never plumed herself over her possessions as Lily Boone did, nor talked about her pretty clothes. Indeed, she was rather careless about these last, which Aunt Nan attended to. Susan felt a great awe of Aunt Nan. She seemed a very grand person.

"But no one can ever take the place of your mother, Susan," Holliday said with a sigh. "Mamma died three years ago, and I shall never, never get over it."

Joe and Holliday took to each other at once. He called her Miss Fourth of July, and she thought Mr. Joe was perfectly lovely, and wished she had a grown-up brother exactly like him.

One of the secrets referred to was a resolve to find that missing paper for Miss Margaret. They had not the least idea how to begin, but Holliday said people used to set out to find

things without knowing where or how,—like Columbus or Magellan, so why shouldn't they?

It seemed to Susan there was a difference, but she was nevertheless quite willing to follow Holliday on any adventurous undertaking, for the pleasure of her company if nothing else. In the meantime it was most thrilling to picture themselves at the end of a successful quest, presenting the recovered paper to Miss Margaret and receiving her expressions of astonished gratitude.

It happened, as it so often does, that the thing they could do for Miss Margaret was both unromantic and disagreeable. This was to be friendly to Aline.

It was flattering, to be sure, to be taken into her confidence and consulted like grown persons. She led them up to her room to show them how pretty it was, and how charming the view of the Seymour garden from her window. After they had admired it and chatted about other things for a while, she asked them if they would help her in something that was causing her a good deal of anxiety. It was something they could do better than anybody else.

When Miss Margaret spoke in this way, it

was impossible to refuse her. Susan and Holliday were eager to do anything for her.

She then explained that Miss Arthur had been the kindest of friends to her in a trying time, and how for this reason in particular she was anxious to do something for her niece. Aline's mother had died when she was a baby, and she had led a roving life with her father, growing up untrained and uncontrolled. Now her father was dead and she had come to live with Miss Arthur, who was her only relative.

"Miss Arthur thinks that what she needs more than anything is association with girls of her own age," Miss Margaret went on, "and she thought she would be happier in a small class like ours than in a big school like Mrs. Knight's. She is a strange girl, and I don't know how to get a hold upon her, but I think you could help me."

"Why, Miss Margaret," Holliday exclaimed, "she hasn't any manners at all. If you try to be nice to her, the first thing you know she turns around and slaps you. I don't mean really, you know, but she says something that is just like a slap."

“ I know she is brusque, and inclined to misinterpret things, but could we not overlook that for a while? ”

“ I should think that would spoil her all the more,” objected Holliday.

“ She makes fun of everything,” added Susan.

Miss Margaret smiled. “ We’ll try not to spoil her, but don’t you think you could be more sociable without running that risk? Now yesterday you two sat in the window by yourselves at recess, with a book, and Bessie and Lily were playing dominoes. Aline was left alone.”

“ We were reading poetry, and Aline hates poetry,” said Susan.

“ And she probably hates dominoes too,” Holliday added, laughing.

“ Oh, I know it isn’t easy,” Miss Margaret owned, “ but I am sure you and Susan are bright enough to think of some way of being friendly if you try. You have such good times together you must not be selfish in your friendship.”

But for all Miss Margaret’s confidence in them, and their desire to do what she wished,



“‘OH, I KNOW IT ISN’T EASY,’ MISS MARGARET OWNED.”

it wasn't easy to be sociable with Aline. "I don't believe there is anything she really likes," Susan said, when she and Holliday reached the corner where they must part.

But a storm which occurred a day or two later was the means of showing the best side of this difficult young person.

It was a very severe storm, with thunder and lightning, a high wind and heavy rain and hail. Beginning just as the little children were being dismissed, more than an hour passed before it was safe for any one to venture out. For a time it was really alarming, and Lily, who was afraid of lightning, began to cry and beg to have the blinds closed and the gas lighted, as grandma always did in a storm. This was not possible as there were no blinds, but Miss Margaret did her best to pacify and reassure her.

Lily's panic might easily have spread if Aline had not gathered the smaller children around her and begun to tell them a story. When Miss Margaret was at liberty to give some attention to this part of her flock, she found them having a beautiful time circling around Aline and uttering strange sounds and making stranger motions.

"We are wind fairies, Miss Margaret," Robin announced, running to her with an alarming "Whoo-oo!" "My name is Gale, and Daisy's is Breeze, and Mamie is Zephyr."

"This is good of you, Aline," Miss Margaret exclaimed. "Where did you learn how to entertain little people so well?"

"I don't know," Aline answered. "It is just a story my father used to tell me;" but she looked pleased at Miss Margaret's praise.

Susan and Holliday, who had been sitting in the window watching the storm, felt ashamed that they had thought only of themselves.

Just as the outside gale was calming down, the inside one came to grief with a bumped head, and while he was being consoled, through the swinging doors came the rector, Mr. Bright. He was already popular with Miss Margaret's class, for he had a hearty, cheery manner and a gift for story telling, and everybody was glad to see him. When Robin was himself again, they drew up their chairs in a sociable group and asked for a story.

"What about?" the Rector wished to know.

"Tell us about the Wise Man and how he

came to be buried here," suggested Holliday.

Mr. Bright had a way of doing as he was asked, without tiresome preliminaries, so he told them about the minister who had served St. Mark's faithfully for many years, and who died suddenly one Sunday night after having preached a sermon from the text: "Every one therefore who heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them shall be likened unto a wise man who built his house upon a rock." He had no family or near relatives, and in his will made a request to be buried within the walls of the church. When his wish was carried out it seemed fitting to his friends to put upon his gravestone the words which had inspired his last message, for he was a wise man, faithful to the commands of his Master.

"It is rather appropriate to have a wise man buried in our school-room," said Holliday.

"Why can't we take that for our text?" asked Susan.

Miss Margaret had asked them to choose a class text, but the matter was as yet undecided.

At first it seemed rather a queer text, but after they had talked it over it seemed more desirable. Mr. Bright suggested the words from

St. Luke's Gospel: "Like a man who built an house, and digged deep and laid the foundation on a rock."

"I always liked that story," said Bessie. "You feel so glad that after the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew, the house stood."

"Tell about the one that tumbled down," urged Robin, for this was to him the most interesting part of the story.

"I don't see what it means, anyway," Aline objected.

"Tell us please, Mr. Bright," said Holliday.

"Do you really want a sermon?" he asked, laughing. "Well, the house in the story is the symbol for what we are in ourselves,—what we make of ourselves. The first thing in building is a good foundation; to get that we have to dig deep,—work hard. If we do this, following the example, obeying the words, trusting the help of Christ our Master Builder, the house we raise will be able to withstand all the storms of sorrow or temptation that beat upon it.

"The man who built on the sand was probably indolent; he said, 'What's the use? I

don't like to dig, the storms may not come; I will take it easy and trust to luck. I'll have a merry time now and not think about the future!' Through not being willing to take trouble in the beginning he lost everything in the end."

"There is another thing," said Miss Margaret, as the rector paused. "Though digging is hard, there is pleasure in it too,—in conquering difficulties." There was a pretty glow in her face as she spoke.

"Ah, Miss Kennedy, if you can inspire your pupils with that feeling you are a successful teacher," Mr. Bright said.

"I *dag* an awful deep hole th' other day," put in Robin.

At this point Mrs. Boone's coachman appeared at the door. He had come for Lily and as many more as the carriage would hold. And thus ended the sermon.

CHAPTER VIII

CHRISTMAS TREE HOUSE

There are tales galore
Of love and war;
Of fact and of fancy free,
But we like the most
A lonely ghost,
In a tale of mystery.

“YES, honey, I knows it. White folks say there ain’t no ghosts, but you’s bound to believe the testimony of your vision, Miss Susan, an’ I done seen that Christmas Tree for myself,—yes’m.” Mammy Ria shook her head solemnly as she opened the oven door and drew out a pan of gingerbread.

“Oh, how good it smells!” Susan exclaimed.
“But go on and tell us about it, mammy.”

“Please do,” Holliday urged.

Mammy shook her head again. “You all ’ll jes’ say it’s foolishness,” she objected, pushing the pan back and closing the door.

“No, indeed, mammy, we won’t. Will we, Holliday? Please, now.”

Mammy Ria lived in a comfortable little

cabin back of Miss Arthur's country place, where her husband, Uncle Dan, helped with the gardening. The country car which ran as far as the new reservoir, passed near Miss Arthur's gate, and from there it was only a pleasant walk. Susan loved to go to see Mammy Ria, and to-day she had Holliday with her; and besides this they had left Miss Margaret to make a call at the Arthurs', and were to stop for her on their way back and see Aline for a little while.

Mammy was ironing in her spotless kitchen, a task well adapted to story telling, and the promise of a feast to come was in the air. Through the open door you saw in the next room a wonderful white bed with ruffled and fluted pillow covers, and a spread old Miss had given her when she was married. Mammy was short and stout, with a clear brown skin and a grizzled head upon which she wore a bright bandanna, in the old-fashioned way, and her manners belonged to the same period. She loved dearly to tell a story, and her reluctance was merely feigned for the pleasure of being urged.

"Well," she began as Susan and Holliday

settled themselves to listen, "I ain't seen that tree but once, but old Zeke told Dan that whenever they leaves the shutters of the east parlor open at night you kin see the Christmas tree and Miss Tina steppin' here and steppin' thar, hanging pretties on it. The night I seen it, I was comin' from Miss Julia's, where they had been havin' a dinner company, and I wasn't lookin' to see it, but was studyin' 'bout some shirts for my old man. I come along by the Seymours', Miss Susan, and I stopped on the corner to see if there was a car, an' I jes' happen to glance towards the Clifford house,—that's what I calls it—and there in the east window was that Christmas tree, plain as day. Yes'm, plain as *noon*-day. Don't talk to me 'bout there ain't no ghosts. There's somethin'." Mammy brought her iron down with emphasis.

"Weren't you awfully frightened?" asked Holliday.

"I reckon I was, honey. I jes' lit out down North Street fast as I could run. For I tells you, Miss Holliday, that was a ghost tree, 'cause there ain't no tree in that room in the daytime. I'se been thar. I don't care how you 'splain it, for you *can't* 'splain it. And

Miss Anne she don't 'low those shutters to be lef' open any more."

"But, mammy, who was Miss Tina? Tell us the whole story," said Susan, as mammy, opening the oven door once more, took out the gingerbread and turned it upside down on the flour sieve.

"Well, honey, the beginnin' of it was long ago, when old Mr. Ben Clifford built that house, 'way back yonder. They used to say he cheated his brother out of his share of their father's money, but I don't know nothin' 'bout that. The old Clifford place was just across the road from Miss Mary's,—that's your grandma,—an' I used to hear the white folks talkin' 'bout Mr. Ben doin' his brother so mean. Anyway, he built the grandest house ever seen up to that time in this part of the country. I heard Miss Mary say the doors was solid rosewood, with solid silver knobs, and the furniture in the big parlor was solid gold. Yes 'twas, Miss Susan, it come from Paris.

"Miss Geraldine, Mr. Ben's oldest daughter, had a comin' out party, and Miss Mary went to it. I was waitin' on her then, and she told me all about how grand it was, and how fine

Miss Geraldine was dressed. Well, it looked like the Cliffords wasn't to have much comfort in that house, fine as it was, for only a few months after her party Miss Geraldine died. It was from an overdose of somethin', and they called it an accident, but folks said she took it on purpose, 'cause Mr. Ben, her pa, wouldn't let her marry as she wanted to. It looked like they didn't have much reason,—those Cliffords. If they couldn't have exactly what they wanted, they up and did some foolish thing like that. Then it wasn't long before Mrs. Clifford died, and then young Mr. Ben and another of the daughters, till only Miss Anne was left, and old Mr. Ben. Then Miss Anne she married Mr. Carrol, and nothin' would do but she must live at home with her father. Miss Anne was always curious, and after a while her husband he went off to some foreign land, so they say, and never did come back. All Miss Anne's children died young but Mr. Ben, who was named for his grandpa, and they was always takin' him here, there and everywhere for his health.

“ Well, Mr. Ben grew up and married Miss Tina Graham and by and by they had two

children, and when the youngest wasn't but a year old, young Mr. Ben died. Miss Tina and the children and Miss Anne their grand-ma, and her father old Mr. Ben, lived together in the old house. It was when the children was four or five years old,—the winter you was a little baby, Miss Susan, and I was livin' with Miss Kitty and Mr. Frank and lookin' after you and Mr. Joe,—that the accident happened. It was Christmas Eve and Miss Tina was trimmin' a tree for the children, in the east parlor. They had been put to bed in the nursery, with their stockin's hangin' before the fire, and their nurse sat there till they was asleep, and then she went down to the kitchen for somethin'. Well, nobody ever knew just how it happened, 'cept that the children must have woke up and got out of bed to look at their stockings, but somehow they caught on fire,—and way off from everybody in that big house with the doors shut—”

“ Oh, mammy, they didn't burn up? ” cried Holliday.

Mammy nodded, “ Yes'm. The nurse she 'clar to goodness she wasn't more than a minute, but I reckon she hadn't much sense no-

how, for 'stead of puttin' out the fire she ran screamin' for Miss Tina, and it was too late."

"Just think of those dear little children. Mother told me about it once ever so long ago, I remember now," said Susan.

"It was the terriblest thing ever happened in this town, an' it did look as if there was a curse on that house. It killed old Mr. Ben, and Miss Tina never was herself again. Her mind jest wandered on Christmas trees, an' she was always trimmin' one for the children. The tree was left standin' in the east parlor for ever so long, but when I was there durin' Miss Tina's last illness it had been took away. Miss Anne is still livin' there, and they do say she is gettin' mighty queer. Looks like she'd had trouble enough.

"And now, Miss Susan, honey, that's all there is to it. If you can 'splain about that Christmas tree, you can 'splain it. All I know is, I seen it, and Silvy seen it, and they do say Miss Anne seen it once herself and that's why she don't 'low those shutters lef' open any more."

"I certainly can't explain it, mammy, but I wish I could see it," Susan replied.

"We can see Christmas Tree House from

our windows," said Holliday, "and I mean to look out every night, so if the shutters are open I shall see the tree."

Mammy Ria's fresh warm gingerbread offered a welcome change of subject after the sad story, and then they remembered their promise to Miss Margaret not to forget how short the afternoons were.

"Do you suppose it is just imagination, Holliday, about the tree?" Susan asked as they walked up the long avenue leading to Miss Arthur's house.

"I don't know. Maybe there are ghosts." Holliday shivered and glanced over her shoulder. The house was not yet in sight, and the tall cedars cast dark shadows across the road. A squirrel scurrying through the leaves beneath a great beech made them both start. They looked at each other and laughed a little nervously, and Holliday asked if it was much farther? A moment more, however, and a turn brought them out into a broad sunlit space before the house, where the thought of ghosts seemed less alarming.

They found Miss Margaret with Miss Arthur in her handsome drawing-room, which

opened at one end into a conservatory, and a maid was bringing in tea. Miss Arthur, who was herself handsome and stately, received them graciously, and sent for Aline, who presently appeared and seemed rather pleased to see her schoolmates.

Her white dress was far more becoming than the black she wore at school, and Miss Margaret's eyes for the first time discovered a certain promise of beauty in the tall, awkward girl. It was plain that her aunt did not see it, and that her attitude towards Aline was very critical. She was evidently contrasting her with Holliday as the three girls sat together on the divan, and wondering no doubt why fate had sent her such a plain, unattractive niece.

Everything about Miss Arthur's house was handsome and costly, but it lacked the home-like touch. Aline took the girls up the broad, shallow staircase to her own room, which was large and beautifully furnished; yet as Susan said afterwards, it was just like a spare room. There were no little girl treasures about, nothing to express the owner herself.

"This is a lovely house, Aline," Holliday

said. "You aunt is very good to you, isn't she?"

"I suppose she is," was Aline's indifferent answer. "She thinks it is her duty, that's all."

"But I think she is fond of you, Aline," said Susan.

"No, she isn't. If I looked like Holliday, she would be; but she is always finding fault, and Miss Ross carries tales about me."

It was embarrassing when Aline talked in this way.

Miss Ross was Miss Arthur's companion who had lived with her for a number of years. Aline often spoke of her in this contemptuous tone.

"She is afraid I may cut her out," Aline continued, "but she needn't be, for when I am eighteen I am going away somewhere and earn my own living."

"Oh, are you, Aline? What lovely paper dolls! Look, Susan!" and Holliday bent over a table where among brushes and water color materials lay several dolls with their wardrobes spread out around them.

"That one is not dry yet," said Aline. "I

was working on it when you came. I am making them for the gardener's little girl, who is sick."

"Why, they are beautiful, Aline. Is this the way you are going to make your living?" asked Susan. "See, Holliday, the brown-eyed one looks like you."

"Do you think they are good enough to sell?" Aline exclaimed, evidently pleased with their admiration.

"I'll tell you what would be fun," said Susan, "to have a society—just Miss Margaret's class, you know, and make things and have a sale and help somebody, some poor person, with the money."

In the drawing-room Miss Kennedy was trying to say some pleasant, hopeful things about Aline to her aunt. She spoke of Aline's fondness for children and what a help she had proved the day of the storm.

"Thank you, Margaret, but I am afraid I cannot see it," Miss Arthur replied. "She seems to me hopelessly cold and antagonistic. Yes, she is fond of children, I believe. She spends a good deal of time over at the gardener's. Possibly she would make a nursery

maid, but that wasn't all I hoped for in my brother's daughter."

"I think Aline is very much like her aunt," Susan announced as they walked down to the car, Miss Margaret in the middle.

"Why, do you? I don't," cried Holliday. "Miss Arthur is—elegant and—"

"I know, but there's something underneath that's like her."

"Susan, where did you get such insight, I'd like to know?" said Miss Margaret.

For a moment Her Shyness thought she was being laughed at, and the color surged into her face, but it turned to a glow of pleasure when Miss Margaret went on to say that it had not occurred to her before, but now Susan mentioned it, she believed it was true. They were alike. The difference lay in age, training, and environment.

"Susan doesn't talk to people much, but she looks at them and thinks about them," observed Holliday.

"She regards them as she does her story books," Miss Margaret added.

When they reached the little station, which resembled a bird cage more than anything else,

whom should they find perusing the afternoon paper there but Joe. He immediately suggested walking up to the reservoir to meet the car just for the pleasure of being out of doors in the glorious air. This was what he said, but as he took his place beside Miss Kennedy it was plain he was enjoying more than the air. Susan and Holliday followed, gathering leaves and berries and laughing at everything and nothing, as people do when they are young and merry.

Altogether it was a happy afternoon. As they said good-by to Miss Margaret at the Brocade Lady's gate, they all decided that on some other Saturday afternoon they would do the same thing, or something like it.

CHAPTER IX

AN ADVENTURE

You little guess what happenings wait
Behind that stately iron gate.

WHEN Holliday and Susan met that Saturday morning at Self and Son's, nothing was farther from their thoughts than an adventure. Susan needed a pencil and Holliday a composition book, and they both intended to go straight home and finish their lessons. But it was a delicious morning with an intoxicating freshness in the air that called for something more exciting than lessons. Having once breathed deeply of it, you were lost.

"There's all afternoon and to-night, Susan," Holliday exclaimed, meaning for lessons. "Let's take a walk."

Susan, hesitating between a red and a blue pencil, said, "Mother has gone down town, but I think she wouldn't mind, if we don't go far."

"No, we won't go far," Holliday agreed, "and we'll stop at Browinski's and get some

taffy. Papa gave me my allowance this morning." She stroked the parrot's head with her forefinger as she spoke.

"Better not, dearie. He might bite you," cautioned Herself, who was waiting on them.

"Oh, pshaw!" cried the parrot, who appeared much taken with Holliday, and had been showing off in his very best manner. Mrs. Self looked not unlike one of her old worn books this morning, so rusty and faded she was almost illegible. Himself was very bad with the rheumatism, she told them.

Holliday said she was awfully sorry, and Susan hoped he'd soon be better, and then out into the sunshine they went and forgot all about the troubles of the Selfs.

At the corner they met Robin Bright and his little dog Foxy.

"Lemme go wid you, Susan! Lemme go wid you, Holliday!" he cried, and Foxy's tail,—what was left of it, and his bright questioning eyes made the same plea.

"Come on," called Holliday. "I don't know where we are going, but you can come."

At Browinski's, where they stopped for the taffy, they found Lily Boone, waiting while

her grandmother ordered good things for Sunday. Susan didn't see any reason for asking her to go along, and she was disappointed when she accepted Holliday's invitation and let her grandmother drive away without her. Holliday was always doing things like this. Susan wished she wasn't quite so sociable. She had even asked Sophy Idelle to come to see her.

Susan, who had once played with Sophy Idelle, found her rather stupid now, though there were certain indisputable advantages in her friendship. Grandpa Browinski was liberal in the matter of cream puffs and other dainties, and on occasion Sophy had been known to treat to ice cream. It was understood that she was not exactly on a social footing with the rest of them. For instance, Lily Boone did not invite Sophy Idelle to her Christmas party, yet Lily did not disdain one of her cream puffs. It did not seem quite fair. When she said something of the kind to Joe, he pointed out that Mrs. Boone was one of Browinski's best customers, and that it was all in the way of business. As for Sophy Idelle, he added, she would get there some day.

Sophy wasn't in the store this morning, so of course was not invited to join the expedition; and after all, Lily was harmless. It was too pleasant out under the blue sky to mind anything.

They walked on, not thinking nor caring where they were going, until Foxy, who was running ahead, suddenly turned in at an open gate, which proved on investigation to belong to a private alley. Robin ran after his dog, and as the girls looked in at the gate they saw him disappear within one of the stable doors that opened on the alley.

"Robin! Robin!" called Holliday. "Where do you suppose that child has gone?"

After waiting a minute or two they followed him. Holliday, peeping in at the stable door, beckoned to her companions. "I see him. There isn't any one here. Come on."

"It isn't very polite to go into back yards," Susan objected. "Call him again, Holliday."

If Robin heard he paid no heed, and as Holliday pointed out, circumstances alter cases, and polite or not, there was nothing to do but go after him. So they slipped through a paved stable yard into a large garden, once

evidently laid out with care but now neglected.

"I wonder—" Susan began, when Holliday grasped her hand. "Susan, do you know where we are?" she cried. "See that statue! It is Christmas Tree House!"

"And there is Robin going in,—at the basement door," Susan exclaimed. "What shall we do? The door is shut, see!" They looked at each other in astonished perplexity and dismay.

"Oh, what is the matter? Is it the haunted house? Oh, Susan, oh, Holliday, let's run. I am so afraid!" Lily wrung her hands.

"You needn't be a baby, Lily Boone, we have got to find Robin." Holliday spoke sternly. "Ghosts won't hurt you in the daytime, but if you are afraid you can go back, or straight through to the front gate."

"Come with me please, please, Susan!" Lily wailed.

"Suppose we do go around to the front door, Holliday, and ring the bell," Susan suggested, rather uneasy herself.

This seemed sensible, as there was no sign of Robin, and with quick-beating hearts they tiptoed through the grass, in and out amongst

the shrubbery, oppressed by a queer guilty feeling, only to find when they reached the front that the garden was fenced off on both sides from the entrance, and though there was a gate near the flight of steps it was securely locked. The street outside looked sunny and quiet. Holliday laughed uneasily as she looked across at her own home. "It seems so funny that it's there and we can't get to it," she said.

"What shall we do now?" cried Lily.

"We'll have to go back through the alley, and around Pine Street, I suppose," Holliday answered.

"And leave Robin here? They might steal him," said Susan.

"Then the only thing to do is to knock at that back door," said Holliday firmly. "You can do as you please, Lily. Susan and I are going to find Robin."

By this time Lily was quite as much afraid to go as to stay, and could only hold fast to Susan's hand and cry.

The basement door, when they reached it, was not latched, and after knocking and calling Robin and getting no response of any kind,

Holliday pushed it open. Before them was a long passage, with stairs going up to the floor above and a door with a fanlight at the other end.

More and more mysterious seemed Robin's disappearance. Indeed, the sense of mystery rested heavily on them. The thought of the little burned children, and the poor mother who spent her days trimming Christmas trees, oppressed them. No wonder they started and drew close together when a draught from somewhere above caused the door by which they had entered to close suddenly. After that the quiet began to seem alarming.

"We'll have to go and tell Mr. Bright," Susan whispered in desperation. But now another obstacle intervened. The door refused to open. It was a massive door and something was amiss with the lock. Nor could they do any better with the street door when, stealing along the passage like guilty things, they tried it.

"I never knew such a place! What's the matter with all the doors?" said Holliday. She held her head up bravely, but her voice trembled. Everybody knows how dreadful is

the feeling of being locked in and unable to escape. "I am going up those stairs," she announced steadily.

"Oh, Holliday—are you?" gasped Susan.

As they stood close together at the bottom of the flight, a low murmur of voices came to them from remote regions above. "Come," said Holliday firmly, and up they went three abreast.

They emerged presently into a broad, well-lighted hall, so much like other halls that they felt a little reassured. Holliday went softly forward, the other two following. In a room on the right a lady and gentleman sat talking. The lady was the same one who had spoken to them on the day of the runaway.

She looked up now in surprise at sight of Holliday and asked haughtily, "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"We are looking for Robin Bright. He ran in here after his dog, and if you'll please—"

The lady rose, interrupting Holliday. "Nonsense!" she said. "There is no child or dog here. It is nothing but idle curiosity that has brought you. What's that girl crying for?" For Lily was weeping afresh, clinging

to Susan. The military-looking gentleman also rose.

"But Robin *is* here. We saw him run in. Please look. He is Mr. Bright's little boy," Holliday answered, standing her ground.

At this moment an unmistakable "woof, woof," sounded from behind the folding doors. Crossing the room, Mrs. Carrol opened them, and out sprang Foxy, joyously, and there seated at a table with a large illustrated book before them were Aline Arthur and Robin. The latter slipped down and ran to meet them.

"Hi, Susan! Hi, Holliday! Didn't I fool you?" he exclaimed.

Aline sat still and laughed.

"Please explain this, Aline," said Mrs. Carrol.

"Why, Robin ran into the garden, Cousin Anne, and I called him in and hid him to tease the girls."

"We are very much obliged to you, Miss Aline Arthur," said Holliday, her eyes blazing. "I am sorry we had to come into your house, but we couldn't help it," she added, turning to Mrs. Carrol.

The old grizzled negro now appeared from

somewhere, and his mistress, without noticing Holliday any further, ordered him to show these children out; and out they went, Robin, Foxy, and all. When they reached the gate at the foot of the stone steps, Aline was heard calling a mocking good-by from the porch above.

"I think Aline is very disagreeable," said Susan. "And what was she doing in Christmas Tree House, I wonder?"

"Disagreeable?" echoed Holliday. "I think she is hateful. And as for you, Mr. Robin Bright, we won't take you to walk again very soon."

While they waited for Lily to dry her eyes and straighten her hat, the military-looking man passed them. "Well, I am glad to be out of that haunted house," Lily was saying, still tearfully.

The man paused. "I think you had better drop that nonsense of the haunted house," he said. "There is no such thing."

The girls looked at each other. "Well, did you ever!" exclaimed Holliday. "Who is he, I wonder?"

"I don't know," said Susan. "But how

did Aline happen to be there? Is she related? She said 'Cousin Anne.' Oh, Holliday, weren't you thinking all the time about those children! Wasn't it dreadful!"

And yet by the drugstore clock it had all happened in less than an hour.

That afternoon Mrs. Boone came over with a highly colored version of the adventure gleaned from Lily, who she declared had not yet recovered from the shock. "Lily is of a most sensitive and delicate organization," she said. "Of course, Holliday and Susan didn't realize what they were doing when they dragged her into that house against her will. Why, I had to give her aromatic spirits of ammonia and put her to bed."

"Susan, I never dreamed of your doing a thing like that!" Mrs. Maxwell exclaimed, when Mrs. Boone had left. "Going into a strange house—I can't understand it."

It did not seem quite so dreadful after she had heard Susan's own story, and yet—

"The truth is, we are not used to Susan's having adventures," said Joe.

"It is very odd, too, that Aline should have been there," Mother continued. "Yes, the

Carrols and Arthurs are related. Old Mr. Ben Clifford, who built that house, had one brother, who was Miss Arthur's grandfather,—her mother was a Clifford. But the brothers quarreled, and the two families have had nothing to do with each other since."

Holliday couldn't stay angry with anybody for long, and by Monday morning her curiosity had the better of her indignation against Aline. "I don't think it was a bit nice of you to hide Robin," she said, "but what were you doing in Christmas Tree House, Aline?"

Aline laughed. "You were scared, weren't you? I suppose you and Susan believe all those silly stories. Cousin Anne is my father's own cousin, and I don't know why I shouldn't go to see her if I want to. Miss Ross dared me to go, and I went. That is all; and I like Cousin Anne. I'd pity myself if I believed in ghosts."

"Did your aunt know you were going?" Susan asked.

"I don't see that it is any affair of yours whether she did or not," was Aline's blunt retort.

CHAPTER X

A BLACK SPIDER

“You may sit on your tuffet,
Yes, cushion and stuff it,
And provide what you please if you don’t fancy whey,
But before you can eat it,
There’ll be, I repeat it,
Some sort of black spider to come in the way.”
—*Mrs. Whitney*, “Mother Goose for Grown Folks.”

It was Sophy Idelle who began the trouble, and yet to be perfectly fair she could not be said to have had very much to do with it, either.

Susan was not altogether pleased when she started out with her books under her arm on Monday morning to find Sophy Idelle waiting for her at the gate. She expected to meet Holliday at the corner and wanted to tell her about Aline, and how she was related to Mrs. Carrol, at Christmas Tree House. Sophy was tiresome anyway; so her greeting was cool.

“I staid at my aunt’s last night and I thought I’d stop by for you,” Sophy said.
“How are you getting on at school?”

“Oh, very well,” Susan replied.

“I suppose you don’t have to study much.”

“Indeed, we do.” Susan resented Sophy’s tone of superiority. “Miss Margaret knows a great deal more than most teachers. She has been to college. Besides, we have French and—”

“I could go there if I wanted to, but I don’t think I’d like it,” Sophy interrupted loftily.

“I don’t think you could, Sophy, for Miss Margaret hasn’t room for any more now,” said Susan.

At the corner she paused to look for Holliday, who had promised to walk down a square to meet her if she was early enough, but there was no Holliday in sight. “I think I’ll go this way, Sophy,” Susan said. “I told Holliday I would.”

Perhaps if she had not shown so plainly in the first place that she did not care for Sophy’s society, Sophy would not have chosen to misinterpret her action now. The confectioner’s granddaughter, though not exactly bright, was something of a genius in the art of teasing, and at sight of Charlie Willard coming up Vine Street she saw her opportunity.

“Oh, very well, Miss Philadelphia, if you’d

rather walk with a boy, I am sure I don't care. Good-by."

Until that moment Susan had not seen Charlie. Her face flamed. "That's a story, Sophy Idelle," she cried, but Sophy was already halfway across the street.

"All right, Miss Philadelphia," she called back jeeringly.

Susan, overwhelmed by her old enemy, wondered miserably if Charlie had heard.

If so, he did not betray it, but asked cheerily, "How are you, Susan? Going this way?"

Susan knew him very well. He was Lily Boone's cousin, and they had sat side by side in the infant class at Sunday School for several years. Charlie had weak ankles and wore clumsy braces, but he jerked along merrily in spite of them, only a slight frown on his freckled brow betraying the effort it cost. He was a nice boy, and Susan really liked him, but Sophy's words aroused all her tiresome self-consciousness, so that her response to his greeting was very slight indeed, and his attempts at conversation as he limped beside her, fell flat.

Lily waited for her at the gate and announced, "Holliday isn't coming to-day."

Susan's wounded spirit received another bruise. Some one else knew more about Holliday than she did. She did not ask why, but merely said indifferently, "Isn't she?" and walked towards the door.

"Susan's cross," Aline remarked, loud enough for her to hear.

It was a most trying day. Everything went wrong without Holliday. Susan wondered and wondered why she had not come, but a silly pride kept her from asking Lily. In her reading lesson she made a foolish mistake. She called the "Girondists" *Gridironists*, as Lily herself might have done, and when the others laughed, she came near crying. Then Miss Margaret, instead of being sympathetic, said she must learn not to mind being laughed at.

The afternoon was not much better. At Madame Bourlier's, where she went with Mother to get her winter hat, she met further difficulties.

The milliner's shop was full of customers. Miss Julia Anderson sat before a mirror with



"SHE CALLED THE 'GIRONDISTS' GRIDIRONISTS."

a hand glass, studying the effect at all possible angles of a drooping white plume, while Miss Betty clasped her hands in an ecstasy of admiration. "With a rhinestone buckle that will be too utterly sweet for anything," she was saying.

"It does rather suit my style, I think myself," Miss Julia agreed, adding, "I adore simplicity."

Now simplicity and Miss Julia seemed far removed. The Brocade Lady declared she looked like a curly poodle, and while this was perhaps an exaggeration, her arrangement of frizzes and braids was something to ponder. However, Miss Julia, like Joe, had admirers enough without the Brocade Lady.

Miss Betty always waited on Mrs. Maxwell, so Susan and her mother sat down and looked on till she should be free. Presently Miss Julia waked up from her absorption in the white plume and was astonished to see them, in spite of the fact that they had often met at Madame's before this.

"*And Susan!*" she exclaimed, after greeting Mrs. Maxwell. "Ah, those pretty, pretty eyes. It is a shame you did not name her

Violet, Mrs. Maxwell, though Susan Hermione is so dignified."

Joe, it seemed, had never corrected this mistake.

"I adore double names," she went on. "Did you ever see such lashes, Miss Betty? Now don't look at me so severely, dear Mrs. Maxwell. Susan can't help knowing she has lovely eyes." Miss Julia put out her hands appealingly, and then returned suddenly to business, with, "I think, Miss Betty, this knot of velvet should be a trifle nearer the front."

Although somewhat embarrassed, Susan could not help being pleased at Miss Julia's frank admiration of her eyes. She examined them furtively when, her turn having at last arrived, she took the chair Miss Julia vacated, and Miss Betty began placing hat after hat on her head. Mother was not easy to please.

"Now here is one that is just the thing. Nothing could be nobbier," Miss Betty said, diving into a box. "We made one like it in blue for Mrs. Seymour's youngest daughter. Miss Susan will look like a picture in it."

"Oh, Mother!" Susan cried, as the hat was placed on her head, "isn't it pretty? I love

feathers!" Certainly the blue eyes did look well beneath the shaded plume which curled around the brim of the little gray velvet hat.

It was, as Miss Betty pointed out, quite Susan's style.

"Don't say it is too old, Mother. Elsie Seymour is younger than I am. Please let me have it," Susan begged.

"It is very, very pretty, my daughter, but I fear it is too expensive. I can't be buying plumes like this for you just yet." Mother spoke firmly.

"Oh, Mother!—then I don't want any." Susan was surprised at herself the minute she had said it, and Mother looked as if she could not quite believe her ears.

"I mean—" Susan began.

"Then I shall have to select what seems to me suitable, without your help," Mrs. Maxwell said.

Susan walked away to the front of the store ashamed of the tears that filled her eyes. All the clerks were busy in the show-room, only Madame was matching some velvet behind a show-case. Susan stood looking out through a display of winter millinery at the busy street.

She wanted that hat dreadfully, yet she had no right to speak so to Mother. The street was broad and above the buildings on the other side a bit of sky, blue with a soft white cloud in it, was visible. For some reason she did not understand, she began to feel ashamed.

Presently she slipped back into the showroom, where Mother was still consulting with Miss Betty, a cluster of tips in her hand.

"Mother, please excuse me. I don't mind, really," she whispered.

"If her coat is gray, why not a gray hat like this with knots of cherry velvet?" Miss Betty suggested.

At this moment a very grand lady swept into the shop. "Swept" is not quite the word, she floated rather, for the filmy, gauzy fabrics that fluttered around her seemed actually to bear her along. Madame herself conducted her.

"I want a hat for this girl," she said, and at this Susan perceived Holliday advancing behind her, in her usual tiptoe fashion. The floating lady was evidently "Aunt Nan."

Holliday waved her hand gayly when she caught sight of Susan, and when the trying

on began she looked prettier in each successive hat. There was a certain resemblance between her and the languid lady, in feature and coloring. The difference was in the sparkle.

Holliday introduced her aunt, Mrs. Lawrence, to Mrs. Maxwell and Susan. Mrs. Lawrence was very gracious. Susan heard her telling Mother she regretted very much that she could not have Holliday with her, but it was not possible at present. Holliday, she said with a little shrug, was hopelessly democratic, and saw no reason why she should not make friends with everybody and anybody; and it was so important in this formative period to have refined associates.

Susan wondered if Aunt Nan approved of her. Surely she would not of Sophy Idelle.

"I did not come this morning because Aunt Nan was here," Holliday explained. "And listen, Susan, you know that disagreeable man who said the house wasn't haunted? Well, he is Colonel Brand. He is a Northerner. I don't like Northerners. Do you?"

It was so natural to agree with Holliday that Susan had assented before she knew it. It was only when she was walking home with

Mother that she suddenly realized what she had done. Why, her own mother was a Northerner, not to mention Grandmother and Aunt Emily; and she had in a way repudiated them. And then came the question, would Holliday not like her if she knew? Oh, dear!

"Isn't it funny that when you are having a particularly good time something always goes and happens?" Susan leaned her elbow on Joe's table and watched his pen traveling over a large sheet of paper.

Joe wrote on for a minute, then he tossed away his cigarette, stuck his pen behind his ear and leaned back. "You mean that when your tuffet is particularly soft, and your curds and whey unusually acceptable, a black spider is certain to come along,—*n'est ce pas?*"

Susan smiled. That was it.

"I'll tell you, Susan Hermione, life's a problem and no mistake. What's your trouble?"

"Oh, nothing," she sighed, a little surprised to find that Joe too found life a puzzle.

"Well, I must say you are looking very melancholy over nothing," Joe remarked, lighting another cigarette. "It is just an everlasting grind, and I am tired of it," he continued.

“Colonel Brand is the sort of man who thinks only of business, and regards a little innocent diversion as nothing short of a crime.”

“Of course you have to dig,” said Susan, thinking of the Wise Man.

“Now see here, Susie, don’t you begin preaching. Just please attend to your own foundations.”

“I’m not preaching. You made me think of something Mr. Bright said. And then you are digging, Joe,—studying law.”

“I haven’t been doing much law this week,” Joe confessed, “but I mean to buckle down to it again. In fact,” he went on with some diffidence, “I am trying my hand at a short story. Listen to this, Hermie, and see how it strikes you.”

In the excitement of hearing Joe’s story Susan forgot her own troubles.

“To begin, I have a dandy name for it, ‘The Lost Shrine.’ How’s that? It is the shrine of their love, you know. The man and the girl—I haven’t named them yet—plight their vows in the firelight in the drawing-room of an old colonial house. He is about to leave on a three years’ cruise, and at the end of that

time they promise each other to meet in the same spot,—this chimney corner— Well, something happens to interfere with their letters. I think there is an old dragon of an aunt,—so he does not hear a word from her, and when he returns after the three years he finds the old home in ruins and the girl gone.

“ Then he goes prancing about the country trying to find her, without any success. The old aunt is dead and there are no other relatives. I haven’t worked it all out yet, but in the end he goes to see an old friend of his father, in Washington, we’ll say, and this man is a collector.”

“ A bill collector? ” asked Susan.

“ A bill collector! No, silly! An antiquary, a collector of antiques,—old things;—furniture, silver, bronze. Understand? ”

“ Yes,” Susan said meekly. “ Go on.”

“ Well, this old customer has a house full of historic relics. I know of a chap like that. Everything in his house,—doors, mantels, everything was from some old and noted place. Well, this collector has a secretary. Now I don’t mean a writing desk. Please don’t mistake me—I mean a girl.”

Susan laughed. "Go on, Joe," she said.

"Well, you begin to catch on, don't you? The old chap is telling the young fellow where his library mantel came from. It belonged to some old colonial big-bug, great-grandfather of the girl he was in love with, and of course turns out to be the same old mantel. Then in comes the secretary with some papers, and turns out to be his long-lost sweetheart. Of course the old chap has to be got out of the way somehow, and then a grand love scene. I have just been making an outline of the plot. Of course it has to be worked up."

"It's lovely, Joe! Do hurry and write it. But I thought you said the house was in ruins. How did they get the mantel?"

"Oh, of course something was saved. You see you have to work a story out. I am not sure now but this would work up into a novelette. They are quite the go."

Susan's admiration was ardent enough to satisfy the most exacting author. "Let me tell Holliday," she begged. "Please, Joe. She will promise not to tell."

Joe, after some pretended hesitation, consented, and it was not till Susan had taken up

her history lesson, that she remembered the black spider. Of course she must explain to Holliday, whatever the consequences, but the more she thought of it the harder it became. Holliday had spoken so positively. "I don't like Northerners," she had said. The gray coat from Aunt Emily and the accompanying squirrel muff only made matters worse.

"I can't think what has come over Susan," Mother said.

CHAPTER XI

A TRIBUTE TO GENIUS

Though ills we find
Of many a kind
Which warn us to be wary;
It would appear
The things we fear
Are oft imaginary.

FOR days and days Susan went about attended by that black spider. She would forget it for an hour and be happy again, and then here it came trotting around some unexpected corner. She was always going to explain to Holliday, but each day found it harder to do.

There was the possibility that Holliday would hear the truth from some one else. Sophy Idelle, with her "Miss Philadelphia," was a constant menace. That nickname dated back several years, when she and Susan used to play together occasionally. Sophy was accustomed to brag about her possessions, particularly her clothes, and when this became unbearable, Susan, who couldn't compete with her in

the matter of fine clothes, fell back upon the fact that her own garments, though plainer, came from Philadelphia, and further that Grandfather Norris was Director of the Mint. Sophy, to whom mint merely suggested red and white sticks in glass jars, treated it as a huge joke, and something very like a quarrel had resulted. Was it not the very irony of fate that Sophy Idelle should have revived the old, almost forgotten name just now? Susan didn't know what the irony of fate meant exactly, but it was something Joe frequently mentioned.

"I can't bear Sophy Idelle," she said one day, when she and Holliday were on their way from school.

"Why?" asked Holliday.

"Well, she said a mean thing to me the other day. She said I'd rather walk with a boy, when I hadn't seen Charlie Willard coming and only turned out Vine Street to meet you."

Holliday laughed. "That wasn't so dreadful, Susan. She wanted to tease you. What was that queer name she called you this morning?"

"Oh, I don't know. I mean it was just some

of her foolishness," stammered Susan hastily, feeling dreadfully uncomfortable. And all the while she knew she was a goose, if not something worse.

There were so many things to enjoy at this time, too, if only one had a quiet conscience. For instance, there was the supper at the Presbyterian Church for the benefit of the Mission Band. Miss Margaret's girls and some others were to act as waitresses in caps and aprons, half of them with pink and half with blue bows. Such cunning caps! Holliday and Lily were pictures in theirs, and Susan couldn't help feeling pleased with the face that smiled back at her from the mirror, when she tried on her own. She hadn't lovely curls, and her nose was not as slender as she wished, but her skin was soft and clear and reflected the rose of her ribbons, and she knew she had pretty eyes. It wasn't vain to be glad you hadn't little snapping eyes like Bessie, she thought. Bessie was to play in a duet with her sister in the entertainment that followed the supper. She wasn't a waitress.

Mother had been inclined to object because it was on Thursday night, and she thought

school girls should be limited to Friday and Saturday for going out; but Mrs. Willard, the president of the Band, begged her to make an exception this once, because it was the only convenient evening for the supper.

Supper was to be served from half-past six, and Mrs. Willard charged her waiters to be early. But when she said half-past six, she really meant seven. Promptness was a virtue not much regarded in this part of the country at this time. She did not expect the children to come at six. It happened, however, that the Heywoods' clocks were fast, and when Holliday, accompanied by Gertie, came by for Susan the hour had not struck.

Susan was ready, and they ran over to Lily Boone's, where Mrs. Boone detained them a few minutes with numerous charges to her granddaughter.

"We aren't going to get into any scrape to-night, Mrs. Boone," Holliday assured her.

"Of course, Holliday, I know you didn't mean to frighten Lily. It was only thoughtlessness,—taking her into that house. I wish she wasn't so nervous, but she is exactly like her Aunt Carrie."

Anyway, as Susan remarked afterwards, it was Lily herself who started the scare this time. Her first words as they turned the corner where the new electric light swung, causing such strange, deep, swaying shadows, was, "Oh, girls! have you heard about the crazy man Bessie saw?"

"No,—where?" they asked together.

"At the City Hospital," Lily answered. "They put him there for a day or two, and Bessie was passing and happened to look up at the windows,—don't you know those grated windows on the top floor?—and saw him. He had his hands on the bars, Bessie said. Her brother Tom said it was a crazy man. That was yesterday, and last night he escaped!"

"Honestly, Lily? And haven't they found him?" Holliday asked.

Susan glanced uneasily behind her. Walking on the street at night amid those mysterious shadows was lonely business when the conversation took a turn like this. Gertie was deeply interested, and was reminded of a story she had heard about a lunatic.

"He clumb up the porch and in at the win-

dow, 'clar to goodness, he did, Miss Holliday, and scared Miss Jane most to death. They said he didn't mean no harm, but he thought he was the man in the moon and had fallen out, and was trying to get back."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Holliday, putting into words the fear that Susan had been feeling, "suppose that man should be hiding around here somewhere."

They arrived at the church in safety, however, and the sight of Browinski's man going in with a big freezer was somehow reassuring. The supper was to be in the church parlors, which opened with folding doors into the chapel where the literary and musical program would be given. When they entered, the tables were all in readiness, but no one else had arrived.

The girls took off their wraps and Gertie helped them with their caps and aprons.

Holliday was retying one of Susan's pink ribbons when they became aware of a murmuring sound on the other side of the folding doors.

"Listen!" whispered Holliday, holding up her finger; and when a person says "Listen!"

in a whisper like that, it is apt to make a shiver run down your spine.

They all listened, and presently the murmur came again, but this time more distinct. They caught the words, uttered imploringly, "*I am* not mad!" Then another indistinct murmur, followed by a more imploring, more emphatic, "*I am not* mad!"

"Oh, my land!" cried Gertie. "He's in thar sure as you live!" and she pushed Holliday towards the outside door. "Come on, you all, quick!—fore he gets outen thar." Seized by panic away they went, out of the door and down the narrow walk pell-mell, straight into the arms of Joe Maxwell as that young man came in the gate.

His cheery "Well, I declare! What's up now?" was steady.

"Oh, Mr. Joe! there's a crazy person in the Sunday school room," cried Holliday breathlessly. "Can't you get a policeman?"

"We heard him saying he wasn't mad. They always do, you know," Susan added. "I think maybe they are trying to arrest him."

Lily as usual could only weep.

"A crazy man!" said Joe. "Nonsense!—Jackson," as the janitor appeared on the scene in the act of opening the chapel doors, "who is in the Sunday school room?"

"'Evenin', Mr. Joe. Why, yes, sir, there's a lady and gentleman havin' a *reehearsal* in there."

An inkling of the truth began to penetrate the minds of Susan and Holliday, but Lily still clung to Mr. Joe, who laughed.

"Well, if you aren't a set of geese," he said. "Come on. I'll protect you. We'll investigate this lunatic."

When reluctantly they accompanied him into the chapel, there was Miss Julia Anderson sitting on the edge of the platform fastening up a stray curl and chatting with a clerical-looking gentleman. She did not appear in the least mad.

Lily's tears excited her solicitude, and she pulled her down beside her and petted and kissed her, till the angel began to be restored and to grasp the truth of the situation which Joe with much laughter explained.

Susan and Holliday smiled sheepishly, while Gertie in the background growled to

herself something about "No-account play-actin'."

Miss Julia refused to see anything so excruciatingly funny in it. This may have been partly politeness, or she may have seen in the incident a tribute to her genius. She had never before recited in this room and so had been trying her voice, with the clerical-looking gentleman as audience and critic.

"I don't care," said Holliday, "I think it was perfectly natural, and you needn't laugh so, Mr. Joe."

It seemed Miss Julia had forgotten her fan, and Mrs. Anderson had sent over to ask Joe to take it to her. He left presently, to return later with Miss Margaret, and Susan and Holliday had the pleasure of waiting on them. Miss Margaret looked beautiful. The only change in her usual black dress was a full white ruche.

The front row of seats was reserved for the waiters as a reward for their services in the supper room. When it came to "The Maniac," on the program, a good many smiling glances were exchanged, for that miserable Joe had told the story right and left. But

the sight of Miss Julia on her knees, her lovely arms raised in tragic appeal, begging the jailer to stay and hear her woe, more than ever convinced Holliday that there was some excuse for their fright. As Lily said, it really was heart *rendering*.

Miss Julia was enthusiastically received, and for an encore she gave by request "Tell me I hate the Bowl." Tragedy was her forte.

Bessie's duet was most creditable to the young performers, and there was other music. Altogether the affair was a success.

It was long before Joe ceased to make merry at Susan's expense. "I am not mad," he would declare, falling on his knees before her, until she was moved to retort, "Well, I *am*, if you don't stop."

For Story Hour the next day it chanced that Courage was the subject to be illustrated, and Bessie told of the heroic deed of a young English officer during one of the wars in India. In a town where the English were besieged one of their ammunition wagons exploded. They had but a scanty store at best, and there was great danger that the flames would spread to the other wagons, and to make

matters worse the enemy turned their guns against the spot to keep any one from approaching. The lines of helpless women and children depended on that ammunition, and yet it seemed that nothing could be done to save it, when this young officer with splendid courage dashed forward, and while shot from six cannon fell around him, tore apart the burning mass, and extinguished the fire by throwing on earth and water. Strange to tell he was not even wounded, and for his heroic act he was given the Victoria Cross.

Bessie told the story very well, and then some of the others were reminded of incidents they had heard. "I am afraid we weren't very brave last night," Holliday said, laughing, "but I think Susan was, the day she saved my life."

"The stories are all interesting," Miss Margaret said, "but they illustrate only one sort of courage. There is another sort. Moral courage,—courage to do what we know is right when perhaps we shall be laughed at, or when it may cost us something we value. This is the highest sort of courage."

Susan, who had glowed with pride for a mo-

ment, was miserable again, and grew more and more so as Miss Margaret went on to speak of loyalty. She went home convicted in her own heart of being the worst kind of a coward, —disloyal to her mother, to her family. Matters were much worse now than they had been at the beginning. Now she was a coward as well as a Northerner.

After dinner she wrote this note:—

DEAR HOLLIDAY,

I am going to tell you something, and you won't want to be friends with me any longer. I am a coward. You said the day we were trying on hats that you didn't like Northerners, and I let you think I didn't like them either; but I do, for Mother and Grandma and Aunt Emily are from the North, and I was born in Philadelphia. Sophy Idelle calls me Miss Philadelphia. I know I am almost as bad a traitor as Benedict Arnold. I will give you back your ring, but I am afraid to send it by Robin, who is going to take this.

Sorrowfully yours,

SUSAN NORRIS MAXWELL.

Sad as Susan felt, a great weight was lifted from her, now her confession was made. She shed some tears over the ring, which she took from her finger and put away till she could

give it to Holliday, but Mother called her, and she dried them quickly.

Mrs. Maxwell had some Orphans' Home work she wished Susan to take to the Brocade Lady. "I am afraid you are not well," she said. "You ate hardly any dinner."

Susan said she was all right, and went off with the bundle. Miss Margaret heard her voice in the hall and called her up. She had been there only a few minutes when without ceremony Holliday came rushing in.

"Susan!" she cried, falling upon her, and hugging her till she was breathless, "I have been looking for you everywhere. I met Robin on the way. Why, Susan, you are the biggest—I don't know what." Another fierce hug. "Of course I didn't mean *all* Northerners, but only Colonel Brand. It was lovely of you to care. Why, I should love you if you had been born at the North Pole, and anyway Philadelphia is the nicest sort of a place to be born in. And you aren't a coward. You needn't say you are!"

"Oh, yes, I am, Holliday," Susan insisted. "Are you sure you want to be friends with me still?"

“Susan Maxwell, of course I am,” Holliday cried, and then it became necessary to explain to Miss Margaret.

She was sympathetic and dear. There must be truth between friends, she said, and because their friendship had weathered this storm it would be all the firmer. Susan had been a coward, but she added that a remark like Holliday’s was silly and unkind, as well as narrow and provincial, and she was glad she had not meant it really.

After that they went to Susan’s and got the ring, and Holliday put it on her finger again; and the black spider was seen no more for a season.

CHAPTER XII

“ FAIR AS A STAR ”

So fair, so sweet, she seemed to be
Herself a bit of poetry.

SUSAN established herself in the dining-room window to write a composition, but other matters, having nothing to do with the task in hand, kept claiming her thoughts. The big fern looked dry and she must go for some water; then it occurred to her that it would be pleasant to have Wynkyns for a companion, and it was some minutes before she discovered his hiding place under the kitchen stove; then the fire, flickering lazily in the grate, called for attention, and the fishwoman looked dusty, and finally the postman came with some interesting advertising matter.

She had at last picked up her pad and pencil and asked Wynkyns what in the world she was to write about, when a rap on the window pane startled her, and there was Charlie Willard with a message from his mother to Mrs. Maxwell, about the sewing society.

"What are you doing? Studying?" he asked when Susan returned with her mother's reply.

"I have got a composition to write."

"You mean you've got to write a composition. If you had the composition you wouldn't have to write it. Also, to be elegant you should leave 'got' out altogether," said Charlie, leaning his elbows on the sill of the open window, and grinning at her.

Susan made a motion as if to put it down on his head. "Thank you for your correction," she said loftily.

"If you want to know anything, just ask me." Charlie swung himself on to the sill with astonishing lightness, considering his lameness. "What are you going to write about?"

"I don't know. Miss Margaret said it must be something we see every day."

"That's easy."

"Well, what would you take?" Susan asked.

"Street-car mules," Charlie suggested as a car tinkled by.

Susan laughed. "They are funny little

things, almost like rats, but I am afraid I couldn't write a whole composition about them.”

“A man wrote a long poem once about a sofa,” said Charlie.

Susan nodded. “Cowper,” she said, looking towards the bookcase where there was a blue and gold edition of “The Task,” with fascinating illustrations. “I don't think there is much poetry about it,” she added candidly.

“Holliday says you know heaps about books,” continued Charlie.

Susan flushed with pleasure. “No, I don't,” she said, “but I like them.”

“So do I. Did you ever read ‘Tom Sawyer’? I'll lend it to you. Why, here is my angel cousin,” he exclaimed, as Lily came in the side gate.

“Hi, Charlie! Susan, have you written your composition? I don't know what to write about. Tell me something.”

“Ask your cousin Charlie,” said Susan, laughing.

“Let me see.” Charlie arranged some imaginary curls over his shoulder, folded his

hands and gazed skywards. "Stars," he suggested.

"You don't see those every day," Susan reminded him.

"That's a fact, and perhaps Lily hasn't sufficient astronomical knowledge, either. How about curls? Lily sees those every day."

Lily, dimly aware she was being laughed at, tossed her head. "I am not going to do it," she said. "You are silly."

"Lily's curls are long and slick,
She brushes them around a stick,"

sang Charlie.

"While like any pretty lass
She stands before the looking-glass,"

added Susan, who loved to rhyme.

"Hurrah for you!" cried Charlie. "Let's make one about Holliday."

"What are you children doing?" inquired the person mentioned, coming unexpectedly around the corner of the house. "You must think it is summer, with the window wide open."

"Charlie is in the way, I can't put it down," said Susan.

"We are trying to help Lily with her composition," he added.

"He isn't at all, Holliday. He is making fun of my hair, and yours too. You think you are very smart, Charlie Willard, but you are just a holy *terrier*. Grandma says so."

"Look here, Lily Boone," cried Charlie, while the other two shouted with laughter, "I am not a dog."

"You didn't mean *terrier*, Lily," said Susan.

"I guess I know what I mean. Grandma said it," cried Lily, almost in tears.

"There she is now," Holliday said, pointing to the street, where Mrs. Boone's carriage had stopped at the curb. "She is calling you."

When Lily and Charlie had gone, Holliday slipped lightly in at the window. "Susan, I think I'll write about the grave of the Wise Man, and I want to go around there and look at it. Come with me."

"Why, you know how it looks, Holliday."

"But it is different when you are going to write about a thing. I want to meditate over

it," explained Holliday. "The church is open. They are trying the organ or something, so we can get in. Please come. I have thought of some lovely quotations, that will fill up splendidly. Don't you know in Longfellow, 'All are architects of fate'?"

"Oh, dear!" Susan exclaimed enviously, "I think you are very clever, Holliday. I never thought of that."

"I'll tell you what you ought to do. Write a poem. You can do it, and nobody else can, in the class. You won't need so many ideas for poetry, either. Come on, Susan, you'll think of something on the way, and you can write there as well as here."

Of course Susan went; and as they walked along she considered Holliday's suggestion. She rather liked the idea of writing in rhyme, and this was what poetry meant to her. She did not quite see why blank verse should be called poetry. The sight of a policeman warning some children away from one of the old corner pumps, which had once furnished all the drinking water for the town, gave her a thought with which she decided to experiment while her companion was meditating.



"THE WORD 'SHRINE' CAUSED SUSAN AND HER BROTHER TO EXCHANGE GLANCES."

It was dim and quiet in their school-room. A strip of sunlight lay across the sill of what they called Miss Margaret's window, but the shadows were creeping over the Wise Man's grave. From the church above came the roll of the organ.

Not expecting to find any one there, they were startled at sight of a little figure standing with her hand on the wooden railing that protected the grave. So surprised were they that for a full minute not a word was spoken.

Susan recognized Elsie Seymour, for she had seen her walking with her sister and their governess, and she wore that same plummy hat which had so taken her own fancy at Madame's. The face beneath it was rather thin and pale, but there was something very charming about the eyes and the shy little half smile, as she stood there looking at Susan and Holliday.

As might have been expected, it was Holliday who spoke first.

“How do you do?” she said. “Are you looking at the Wise Man's grave?”

Elsie smiled. “I don't know. Is that

what you call him? I came in to see Cousin Margaret's school-room. Mother and Father are upstairs in the church listening to the organ."

Cousin Margaret! Yes, that explained Elsie's smile. It was like hers.

"You go to school here, don't you?" Elsie asked.

Somehow getting acquainted was very easy after this. She was so eager to hear about the school and the Wise Man, so interested, in her shy little way, in everything they could tell her, that presently they were sitting together on the window sill, outside which the grass grew so close, talking as if they had always known her.

Usually Susan preferred to have Holliday to herself, but Elsie seemed to fit in perfectly. It added to the pleasure to have her gentle little presence.

Holliday explained about the Wise Man and the composition she was going to write about the grave. Elsie did not seem familiar with the story of the man who built on the rock, but asked Susan to write down the reference for her. "So I can read it to-night in

my French Testament,” she said. “I am so glad I came down here,” she added.

“I wish you could come to our class, Elsie. You’d like it, I know,” Holliday said.

“I’d love to,” Elsie answered, and the thought of it brought a soft pink glow to her cheeks.

The interview was a brief one, for in the midst of it a most impressive person came through the swinging doors. That they should go flip-flap behind her just as they did after ordinary mortals seemed disrespectful. Susan retired into her shell, but Holliday saw nothing to be afraid of.

Elsie jumped up. “Oh, Mother, I’m coming,” she said.

“Why, Elsie, what in the world are you doing here?” Mrs. Seymour lifted her glass and surveyed the three as if they were distant and unimportant objects.

“I wanted to see Cousin Margaret’s school-room,” Elsie explained, “and Holliday and Susan have been telling me about—things.”

“I wish you would let Elsie come to school here, Mrs. Seymour,” said Holliday, advancing. “We’d love to have her.”

"Elsie has a governess. We do not care to send her to school," Mrs. Seymour replied in a formal tone. "Come, Elsie," and she sailed away.

Elsie, following, smiled over her shoulder. "Thank you for telling me about the Wise Man," she said. "Good-by."

It was surprising, as Holliday said, that such a disagreeable lady could have such a daughter. "I don't know what it is about her that is so sweet. Do you, Susan? Do you know, I just love her! Aren't you glad we came?"

"Yes, I am, but you haven't meditated much," Susan reminded her, laughing.

This meeting with Elsie Seymour made a profound impression on them both, though they could not explain what it was they liked so much about her. Miss Margaret said Elsie had always been a dear child.

The compositions turned out very well. Susan thought Holliday's wonderfully fine, and borrowed it to read aloud at home. Joe said that if Holliday could only manage to practice all she preached she would soon wear a halo. Miss Margaret, though she praised it,

said she would prefer fewer quotations next time.

Susan wrote her rhyme about the pump, and afterwards copied it in the red diary. Joe suggested one or two of the rhymes, for which he was given due credit.

I'm an ugly old pump standing here on the corner,
And as the days pass I am growing forlorn.
My former companions I see them no more
Though many I had in the bright days of yore.
My old iron dipper that hangs by a chain
Will never be pressed by a child's lips again.
My handle is useless, no one stops to drink,
And I am left here to do nothing but think.

Miss Margaret said this was extremely good, all things considered, but she thought you should learn to write good prose before you turned to poetry.

Susan asked Joe if he thought it was easier to write poetry than prose, and he replied briefly, “Not the genuine article.”

Susan and Holliday rather plumed themselves upon liking poetry, and reading it together in these days. In a little blue copy of Wordsworth's poems which had belonged to Holliday's mother, they chanced upon some

lines beginning: "She dwelt beside the springs of Dove." They read the poem through, and when they came to

"Fair as a star when only one
Is shining in the sky"—

Susan stopped.

"'Fair as a star,'" she repeated. "That makes me think of Elsie." Then after a pause, "Why, Holliday," she cried, "that is poetry!"

"Did you think you were reading prose?" asked Holliday, laughing. "Wordsworth is one of the English poets, Miss Maxwell."

"I don't mean that," said Susan earnestly. "Listen—don't you know how the first star looks when it shines out, after the sun has set, while there is still some color in the sky? Don't you know how quiet and lovely it seems? Well—when it makes you think of Elsie,—or anybody,—that is poetry. It isn't the rhyme that makes it poetry. I never understood before. It is what Joe meant by the genuine article." Susan was fairly trembling

with eagerness. It seemed to her she had made a tremendous discovery.

Holliday looked doubtful. “I think you are getting pretty deep, Susan,” she said, “but I do think it describes Elsie.”

CHAPTER XIII

ORGANIZING

Come let us meet and organize,
In this the greatest profit lies.

“I HEAR Colonel Brand has bought the Carrol house,” Mr. Maxwell remarked at dinner one day.

“Christmas Tree House!” Susan exclaimed. “Perhaps that is why he didn’t want us to say it was haunted.”

“Why does he want a house like that?—an unmarried man,” Mrs. Maxwell wondered.

“He can buy anything he fancies,” said Joe. “He is rolling in money, and maybe he is going to get married.”

“Is he going to live in it, himself?” Susan asked.

Father looked at the paper again. “It says here that he will probably make it his residence. ‘The Colonel is said to be the owner of many art treasures, gathered from the four corners of the globe, for which this handsome

old mansion will make a fitting shrine,' and so on."

The word "shrine" caused Susan and her brother to exchange glances.

"I hope he will not regret his purchase," Father added.

"Why should he?" asked Mrs. Maxwell.

"Well, that story will not easily down, as he will probably discover when he tries to get servants."

"There must be some way of settling it once for all. It seems simple enough. If there isn't a tree there, you can't possibly see it, and we all know poor Mrs. Carrol does not keep a lighted tree the year round in that room. By the way," Mrs. Maxwell continued, "Mrs. Boone says Miss Ross told her Miss Arthur was dreadfully worried about Aline's going there, when she found out about it. It seems the old lady has an idea that Aline resembles her daughter Aline, and has taken a desperate fancy to her. Poor Miss Arthur doesn't know how to manage that girl at all. When she forbade Aline to go to Mrs. Carrol's again, Miss Ross says Aline replied that she thought it was her duty to go."

"Aline hates Miss Ross," Susan remarked.

"I should not wonder if that lady were at the bottom of a good deal of the trouble," Father said.

The Colonel took the same view of the spectral Christmas tree as Mrs. Maxwell. He knew there was no tree in the east parlor, hence it followed that one could not be seen from the outside. When the Brocade Lady advised him to investigate, he refused on the ground that there was nothing to be investigated.

He often dropped in to consult the Brocade Lady, or to talk matters over with her, but he by no means invariably took her advice. He had become a familiar figure in the neighborhood, for every afternoon, rain or shine, he might be seen walking out Pine Street from his hotel accompanied by his big hunting dog, wearing a rather detached and lonely look. To-day he was standing with the Brocade Lady at her door when Susan went in the gate.

She walked up the path very slowly to give him time to make his adieus, stopping to pat Dan the setter, who waited patiently at the

foot of the steps. As she did so she heard the Brocade Lady say:

“And you have no news for me, I suppose, Sidney?”

To which the Colonel replied, “My dear madam, when I have, you may be sure I will let you hear it without delay.”

Susan wondered what news the Brocade Lady was expecting, and then forgot all about it, for a matter of great interest was to be decided this afternoon, neither more nor less than the forming of a club by Miss Margaret's girls.

In these days clubs were beginning to be in the air everywhere. Susan heard Mrs. Boone telling Mother that in her time women staid at home and took care of their families, and for her part she considered this club movement a menace. This did not alarm Susan, however. One of the classes in Mrs. Knight's school met once a week in the afternoon and made fancy things for an Easter sale in view for the benefit of some charity, and Bessie Mann's oldest sister belonged to a literary club, which was studying Browning, with Miss Julia Anderson for president.

The idea had first occurred to Holliday on the day when she and Susan went to see Aline, but she had decided since then that she would prefer a literary club. A diversity of opinion had developed on this question, and Miss Margaret, who had been consulted, and who saw in the plan the possible chance she had been looking for to interest Aline, invited them to hold their first meeting with her. They could bring their fancy work and talk it over sociably, she said.

The Brocade Lady's father and mother, looking down from their gilt frames, might well be astonished at the unusual sight of five laughing girls in that sedate room. No doubt if they could have been heard they would have agreed with Mrs. Boone that this club movement was a menace.

A sociable fire blazed in the old-fashioned grate, and the brass fender and coal bucket did their part in reflecting it. Upon the hearth rug, on which was depicted a large and sleepy lion, after a fashion now gone out, sat Robin Bright.

"I am going to belong," he announced, as Susan, who happened to be the last, came in.

"But you can't; you are a boy," she said.

"Yes, I can. I can belong to anything Miss Margaret belongs to."

"So you see," Miss Margaret added, laughing, "what is involved in inviting me."

"The first thing to vote about is the kind of a society, isn't it?" asked Lily, while Holli-day made room for Susan on the sofa.

"Yes, but suppose we do things in a parliamentary way, and first choose a temporary chairman to preside over the meeting," Miss Margaret suggested; and this of course resulted in her having to take the chair herself.

She then announced that she meant to be very strict, and should insist upon being addressed as Madam Chairman. A good deal of time was consumed over the first motion, but finally, after much laughing and many mistakes, Bessie rose and said, "Madam Chairman," waited till she was recognized, and then moved that they form a club. Aline seconded the motion, and then Miss Margaret said they could discuss it.

"It is like a game, isn't it?" said Susan.

"Well, Miss Margaret,—I mean Madam

Chairman," began Holliday, "I think a literary club would be nicest."

"Then you can move to amend Bessie's motion by adding the word literary before club. Does Bessie accept that motion?"

Bessie did not by any means. She wished to do fancy work or make a silk quilt, and in her eagerness, parliamentary rules went to the winds.

"Quilts! Why, old ladies make quilts," said Aline.

"And we don't want to copy the Knight girls, either," put in Holliday.

"Lots of people besides old ladies make quilts. Carrie made one,—a lovely Roman quilt. But I don't care, only I want to do something, and not just read things and write. That's what Susan and Holliday like to do, and I don't see why they should have everything their way; and Lily thinks so, too." Bessie's eyes snapped and her lips closed firmly.

"Why, Miss Margaret!" cried Holliday, "Susan and I don't have things our way, any more than anybody else. The majority has to

decide and we are perfectly willing. Aren't we, Susan?"

"Let dogs delight to bark and bite,
For 'tis their nature *to*"—

recited Robin impersonally from the hearth rug, where he lay on his back kicking up his heels.

The peals of laughter this caused, cleared the atmosphere and brought the Brocade Lady from across the hall to find what the fun was about. Miss Margaret said Robin was proving his fitness for membership in the club.

The gentleman was extremely pleased at the effect of his sally, and getting up, announced that there was another verse if they wanted to hear it.

Miss Margaret said no, that would do for now, and then Susan's soft voice was heard asking, "Couldn't we do both? Sew and have some one read to us?"

"That sounds well," said Miss Margaret, and then suggested that they ask the Brocade Lady to tell them what she thought.

When the matter was explained to her, she agreed with Bessie in thinking something prac-

tical was to be desired, but saw no reason why there should not be reading.

“If we make things we can help somebody,” said Bessie, complacently.

“And at the same time be learning a useful art,” added the Brocade Lady, who was herself a famous needlewoman.

She wasn’t supposed to have anything to do with it, but when Nancy presently brought in chocolate and tea cakes this was forgotten, and in the end she had a good deal to do with it.

Somebody suggested taking an orphan to sew for, and the Brocade Lady approved and said she knew of one, or thought she did, and if they liked she would have her there next Friday, when they could see her and decide for themselves.

“Would her feelings be hurt if we didn’t like her looks?” Holliday asked.

The Brocade Lady answered with a twinkle in her eye that she would guarantee that. “But I am sure that you will like her,” she added.

“Do you know who it is, Miss Margaret?” Susan inquired.

Miss Margaret shook her head. She had not the least idea.

Thanks to Robin and the Brocade Lady, the first meeting broke up amicably, and all the week long, Friday and the orphan were looked forward to.

So interested were they, that they arrived in a body on the stroke of the clock, and were all presented to the orphan at once, as she sat in the Brocade Lady's armchair, wrapped in Miss Margaret's crêpe shawl,—a large, handsome doll.

Few feminine hearts are proof against the attractions of a beautiful doll, and when it is only a year or so since you gave them up, an excuse for handling and playing with one again is not to be despised. Aline was the only one of the number not entirely pleased. She thought a live orphan would have been more interesting, but the others passed her from hand to hand delightedly, while the Brocade Lady explained her plan.

This was that they should make the doll's wardrobe and then sell her, using the money they received to help some worthy cause. The work, she pointed out, must be well done; no

slipshod sewing would pass muster. Then, further to stir their interest and ambition, she produced a small gold thimble set with turquoise. This she offered as a prize to the best seamstress.

"We will divide the work as evenly as possible," she said, "and when it is all done the one whose sewing is best in every particular shall have the thimble."

It was a perfect love of a thimble. There was not a dissenting voice as to this, but it seemed to charm Aline more than anybody. She put it on her finger and regarded it admiringly. "I mean to win it," she said.

"Why, you can't say that, Aline, unless you are sure you sew better than any of the rest of us," Holliday objected.

"I can say it if I please. I don't know how to sew, but I can learn and I'm going to," Aline replied confidently, surrendering the thimble reluctantly to Lily's outstretched hand.

"If I don't get it Grandma will give me one," Lily said comfortably.

"Bessie is the one who will get it, probably," said Susan. "She made herself a dress once. Didn't you, Bessie?"

Miss Margaret looked a little doubtful over the thimble. She did not approve of prizes, but she could not say so. It was good of the Brocade Lady to take so much interest. She cautioned them to remember that only one could win it, and they must all prepare themselves for disappointment.

"Well," said Holliday philosophically, "that isn't as bad as if four could get it and only one be left. 'Misery loves company.'"

"Why couldn't we be the Society of the Golden Thimble?" asked Susan.

This suggestion was received with enthusiasm, except that Bessie liked "Circle" better, and to the rapidly lengthening list of clubs the Circle of the Golden Thimble was added. The orphan was christened Lenore, and the members adjourned to explore the piece bags in their respective homes for materials out of which to construct her wardrobe.

"In one respect Lenore is better than a live orphan, Aline," Holliday said. "We couldn't sell a live orphan, and I think we'll make a good deal of money on Lenore."

Bessie was made president and Susan secretary of the Circle of the Golden

Thimble, and the Brocade Lady and Miss Margaret were an advisory committee. The former presented them with a most beautiful model book in which were samples of all kinds of plain sewing,—discouragingly perfect, Holliday declared,—accompanied by plain directions.

Miss Margaret said it should be inspiring rather than discouraging, but advised them, as the holidays were so near, to devote themselves to practice work till after Christmas, with “David Copperfield” read aloud as an accompaniment; and to this they agreed.

CHAPER XIV

CHRISTMAS EVE

With merriment the world's astir,
The Christmas candles gleam,
To herald the fulfillment
Of many a happy dream.

IT seemed to Susan in these days that life grew fuller of interest with every passing hour, till with Christmas at hand there was nothing left to wish for.

An expressman was bringing in the box from Grandmother in Philadelphia, as she set out to do a few Christmas Eve errands for Mother, accompanied by Holliday. She stopped to sign for it, and then to wonder and guess about it, till Mother called down that it was after three o'clock.

"But, Mother, it is the biggest box you ever saw! Do come and look at it," Susan urged.

Mrs. Maxwell came as far as the head of the steps. "Remember, dear, you are to meet your brother at a little after four," she reminded Susan.

"We're going now, Mother. Here, Holliday, you can take the package for Self and Son, and this for Miss Tillie's little sister, and I can carry the rest," said Susan, with a lingering glance at the big box as they closed the door behind them.

"Do you know what I am going to do?" said Holliday. "I am going to stop at the grocery and get some animal crackers for old Look-in-a-Book. He ought to have some Christmas cheer."

"He'd prefer boiled beans, I guess," Susan answered, laughing.

There was nothing to suggest the season at the second-hand book shop, which seemed drearier than usual in contrast to the busy grocery. Herself was very grateful for Mrs. Maxwell's package and reported Himself a little easier if anything. Holliday gave the parrot an elephant and a pig, in return for which he went through his accomplishments in great good humor. Then, leaving the bag of crackers with Mrs. Self for Look-in-a-Book's further refreshment, they went on to Miss Tillie's.

Miss Tillie Flynn, who was a seamstress

and went out by the day, lived in a little gray cottage, not much larger than a play-house; but the little brick walk was freshly reddened, and the one little doorstep whitened to the last degree, and in the front window hung a wreath of pine with a knot of red ribbon. Susan explained while they waited at the door that Miss Tillie had a little sister who was lame, and Mother always sent her something.

“I think it would be nice to go to see her sometime,” said Holliday, after the package had been delivered into the hands of Miss Tillie’s old grandmother.

Now this was something Mother had more than once proposed to Susan, but Her Shyness had not wanted to. With Holliday to do the talking, however, it would be different. So she responded, “Well, perhaps,” adding that the lame girl’s name was Susie.

They were to meet Joe at Browinski’s, and this brought them presently to the neighborhood of Christmas Tree House. As they approached it, it appeared closed and deserted. Mrs. Carrol, after selling a good deal of her furniture and other things at a private sale, had moved the rest to a small country place

which she owned and had herself gone, it was said, to a sanitarium.

Colonel Brand did not expect to occupy the house until after the first of the year, but a middle-aged couple whom he employed as caretakers were established in some back rooms. Holliday had seen the woman standing at the basement door one day, superintending the bringing in of a lot of boxes and crates.

"She looked nice and pleasant, and I came near asking her if she wouldn't just leave the shutters of the east room open one night so I could see the Christmas Tree," she said, laughing.

"Holliday, I wish you had," Susan exclaimed, and as she spoke they both saw a dark, foreign-looking man turn in at the gate of Christmas Tree House. He wore a long cape cloak and a large soft hat, and was altogether very strange, and instead of going up the steps to the main entrance, he went to the basement door and let himself in with a key he took from his pocket.

"He looks like a brigand! Who in the world can he be, Susan?" whispered Holliday.

"Could it be the care-taker?" Susan asked.

“No, indeed, I have seen him. He is quite ordinary. I really do think there is something mysterious about this house, Susan. Colonel Brand has gone away. I heard Papa say so. To go walking in with his own key, that is the queer part of this.”

As there was no way of satisfying their curiosity, there was nothing to be done but forget it, and this they quickly did at sight of Browinski's windows, and Joe waiting at the door. Varied and attractive as were other shop windows, Browinski's excelled them all.

Within, the clerks were as busy as bees in a tar barrel, some of them filling candy boxes, of various shapes and sizes, as taste dictated and pocket-books allowed, from five pounds of Browinski's best, in a flower-decked basket, to a quarter's worth of mint and lemon stick; others wrapping up cakes,—fruit, and nut cakes, golden sponge, and Browinski's celebrated pound cake.

Susan and Holliday wandered around admiring, while Joe superintended the filling of a heart-shaped box, the destination of which he would not reveal.

“He'll have to tell Miss Carry where to

send it. Let's listen," Susan whispered. But Joe tucked his parcel under his arm and laughed at them. When they were outside he suddenly thought of something and went back, and when he joined them again it was without the heart-shaped box.

"Did you ever get left?" he inquired, and they were forced to own they had.

Sophy Idelle, coming out of the private entrance, called "Christmas gift," and held up an ermine muff. "It's real and cost a lot," she announced.

"It is awfully pretty, but I wouldn't have one of my presents before Christmas for anything, Sophy Idelle," said Holliday.

What fun it was hurrying through the crowded streets, with night falling, and the lights coming out, and Christmas gayety on every side. Their next stopping place was the station, for Miss Julia was going to spend the holidays in Cincinnati, and Joe had promised to see her off.

The Poet was already there, strolling back and forth with a flower box under his arm. He shook hands with Joe and the girls, and said it was chilly.

The station had its own Christmas story. People rushing in and out of the gates with bags and bundles, holly wreaths, and small trees, suggested returned travelers and happy family reunions, and made you think of snowy hillsides and village church spires, such as Christmas cards portray.

It could not be said there was much satisfaction in seeing Miss Julia off. She did not come till the last minute, and the Poet had to hand his flowers in at the car window, while her smiles shone upon the poetic and the unpoetic alike. No doubt she enjoyed it, however.

"It must be fun to be a young lady and have a lot of men come down to see you off when you go on a journey," Holliday said, as peeping through the gates they watched the train backing out.

But the great event of that Christmas Eve was to come later, when Susan went home with Holliday to supper. She had never before been away from home on Christmas Eve, but Holliday was lonely, and begged very hard. Papa might be late, she said, and Aunt Nan, who was coming to visit them for a week, would

not arrive till nearly ten o'clock. "Just let Susan stay till eight, please, Mrs. Maxwell," she urged, and when Holliday put on that pensive, persuasive air it was impossible to resist her.

The night was chilly, as the Poet had said, and the Christmas fire that blazed on the library hearth at the Heywoods' was very pleasant after their long walk. They sat down before it to wait for supper, with a happy sense of companionship warming their hearts, as they chatted about the good times in prospect.

"Think of it, Susan, a year ago we didn't know each other at all! I didn't even know there was such a girl in the world as Susan Maxwell. Doesn't it seem very queer?"

Susan smiled across the hearth rug at Holliday. "It is lovely," she said. "Lovelier for me than for you, because you have so many friends."

"Not friends like you, Susan," Holliday replied.

Mrs. McCoy came in to say she thought they had better not wait dinner any longer. At the Heywoods' they had dinner at night in-

stead of supper. Holliday went to the window to see if her father was in sight, and presently she gave an exclamation. "Susan!" she cried, "come here—quick!"

Susan ran to her side, and Holliday pointed across the broad street, to Christmas Tree House, which though farther down was clearly to be seen in the bright electric light. The shutters of the corner window were open, and there as plain as plain could be, shone a lighted Christmas tree!

"Well, we have seen it for ourselves; we can't doubt it now," Holliday said.

"I wish Mother was here," Susan said. "It makes me feel dreadfully creepy, Holliday. And don't you see something moving?"

Was there a shadowy figure passing to and fro? It was quite easy to imagine it, when you recalled Mammy Ria's story of poor Miss Tina.

Dinner was waiting and they had to leave the spectral tree. When, some minutes later, Mr. Heywood came in, Holliday told him about it and he good-naturedly allowed himself to be taken to the window to view the wonder. But to Holliday's great disappointment,

the shutters were fast closed as usual, and nothing out of the common to be seen.

Her father laughed at her and declared it was too early in the evening for ghosts, and she and Susan must have dreamed it. Of course they were very sure they had not, but it was of no use to try to convince people who had not seen it, of the reality of that Christmas tree.

“Anyway, I am glad we saw it, Susan,” Holliday said as they bade each other good-night. “And on Christmas Eve, too.”

CHAPTER XV

IN SOCIETY

A tiny cot in a big, big lot
May do in poetry,
But, put to the test, you'll find it best,
To seek society.

LILY BOONE's party was the event of the holiday season. There were other affairs; trees, and spend-the-days and luncheons, and skating parties, but nothing quite so grand as this. To begin with, Lily drove about in Grandma's carriage more than a week beforehand, with a favored friend or two, to deliver the invitations which Alexander, Mammy Ria's half-grown grandson, carried in a silver tray. Susan and Holliday went with her one afternoon, and found it great fun.

Susan felt very important and like a society young lady, wearing her best coat and hat, and bowing to people she knew on the street, among them Sophy Idelle. Nowadays, when invitations are sent by mail or over the telephone, you don't have this fun.

Susan was of two minds about the party. She would not have missed it for anything, and yet she was afraid.

“What are you afraid of?” Holliday asked incredulously.

“I don’t know. There will be lots of strange boys and girls,” replied Susan.

“Well, they will be just like the ones you know,” Holliday reminded her. “That’s nothing.”

Of course it was nothing to Holliday, who wasn’t afraid of anything or anybody, and didn’t know what shyness was.

There was to be real music, Lily proudly informed them,—not just a piano; and she was having a new frock made by Madam Rose, with a fabulous number of medallions in it. Madam didn’t make dresses, only frocks and gowns.

Aunt Emily, who had heard encouraging reports of Susan, sent her a pale blue nun’s veiling, charmingly made, which did much to mitigate her fear of the party. When on the appointed evening she stood before Mother’s long mirror, she felt glad she was going. She wasn’t a beauty like Holliday or Lily, but she

looked very nice. Blue was evidently Susan's color.

"What, still primping, Your Shyness!" said Joe, coming in. "Well," viewing her up and down, "you really do look very nice, and quite grown up. Now I trust you mean to do me credit, and not drop your eyes, and put your head on one side, when you are spoken to."

"Now, Joe, I don't do that," Susan cried.

"Since when don't you?" he inquired.

"Let Susan alone, Joe," said Mother, coming in. "And don't sit on the bureau. She is going to be my own dear little daughter."

"That's just what I don't want her to be. Suppose I went to my party as your dear little son, Mother Kitty!"

"Small danger of that," Mother answered, smiling, as she held Susan's coat for her.

"Now, Susan Hermione, listen to me," Joe continued, "if you will open your blue eyes wide, answer when you are spoken to, and dance when you are asked, and act like other people, I'll give you a bracelet with a turquoise set in it. Honest I will. It's a beauty. It is in the show-case at Neill's this minute."

"Oh, Joe, will you?" cried Susan, clapping her hands and dancing across the room.

"Joe," Mother protested, "you have no money to throw away."

"Now don't you interfere, Mother Kitty. I am educating your daughter. It is a go, Susan. I'll leave it to Holliday to be the judge."

"Don't forget to speak to Mrs. Boone as soon as you get there," cautioned Mother. "There's the bell; it must be Holliday."

As they crossed the street under Gertie's escort, Susan told Holliday about Joe's offer. Holliday thought it an easy way to win a bracelet, and promised to remind her if she saw her doing anything to forfeit it.

The dressing-rooms at the Boones' were a bewildering flutter of ribbons and flounces, and at first Susan couldn't recognize any one she knew. Holliday was in the thick of it at once, flitting about in her butterfly fashion, not caring whether she was acquainted or not. When she slipped out of her cloak, she wore a quaint, short-waisted dress of some soft-tinted, diaphanous silk. Her neck and arms were bare and her lovely hair was gathered in a

picturesque mass on top of her head. Aunt Nan's taste was apparent in it all.

As Susan stood watching her friend admiringly, she became aware of another girl, like herself a little aloof. There was something familiar about the dark eyes, but it was only when the other girl smiled that she recognized Elsie Seymour.

With one impulse they moved together, and Elsie asked how school was getting on. Her manners were of the simplest, and so was her white dress, if her father was the richest man in town. She made Susan think again of "Fair as a star." She seemed to know fewer of the young people than Susan herself, and was clearly glad to have some one to talk to.

A tall boy stood on the top step when they started down, whom Elsie introduced as "My brother Dick." Susan gave him one shy glance, being much afraid of tall boys, but Holliday said, "I think I have heard about you. I know a boy from New Orleans who goes to school where you go." Susan wondered as she saw them talking sociably, how Holliday always happened to have something to say.

After they had spoken to Mrs. Boone and Lily, the girls were handed over to Miss Julia Anderson, who gave each of them a mysterious-looking card attached to a ribbon. Susan's was half a black cat and Holliday's half a pink rose, while Elsie had half a blue sun-bonnet.

Miss Julia, just back from her two days' visit in Cincinnati, was beautiful to behold in a trailing white gown and bare shoulders, for she was going on to a grown-up party later. "Your partners," she explained, "have the other half of the pictures."

Sure enough, in the other room was Miss Margaret, dealing out similar cards to the boys. Susan felt a good deal alarmed at the possibility of a partner she did not know, and Elsie whispered, "I don't know any of the boys. Who do you suppose will be mine?"

They sat together on a sofa and awaited their fate, trying to look cheerful. Elsie talked about Dick, of whom she was evidently very fond. He went to a military school in the East and was at home for the holidays.

After a while, Bessie joined them. "Don't you wish you knew who your partner is?" she

asked, examining Susan's card. "I believe I know," she added.

"Oh, Bessie, is it some one I know?"

"I am not going to tell you. I'm not sure, anyway. If it is who I think it is, you don't know him." Bessie fingered her card absently. "Susan," she said at length, "I'll tell you what,—I know who is my partner. Aline told me. She saw his card. It is Charlie Willard, and I'm mad at him. Suppose we change. You don't mind Charlie. Please, Susan. It will be a lot nicer for you to be with some one you know."

"Would it be fair?" asked Susan.

"Of course; who would care? Ever so many have traded."

It really did seem a very good plan to Susan, at the moment, so she surrendered her black cat and received in return a red shoe.

"Why, Susan Maxwell," said Holliday's voice behind her, "have you gone and traded with Bessie? Well, you are a goose, that's all. She is up to something. She's trying to fool you in some way. Yes, I have found my partner, or he found me," laughing, and she walked away with a boy Susan did not know.

Then presently Mrs. Boone called Elsie away and for a moment Susan sat alone in her corner, feeling forlorn. But remembering her bracelet, she suddenly stood up. Was Bessie playing some sort of a joke on her, she wondered? Bessie was a great tease. All around her surged a gay crowd; new arrivals pressed in. Miss Julia was still busy. No one noticed her in her corner, and she lacked the courage to walk out of it.

"I thought Elsie was here," a voice said, close beside her. It was Dick Seymour, and Susan was actually glad to have him to speak to.

She explained that Mrs. Boone had called Elsie, and Dick said that was all right. He was afraid she was lonely. "Elsie is timid and doesn't know many people," he added.

And then they fell to talking about Elsie in the most friendly way. Dick had heard about their meeting at the Wise Man's grave. Suddenly he said, "Let me see your card, please. I believe I have the match for it."

"Oh, no," Susan began, but lo! there was the other half of the red shoe in Dick's hand. "Why, so it is. How funny!" she exclaimed,

"What's funny?" Dick wanted to know.

"Nothing, only somebody told me who had the other half, and I was surprised," Susan owned.

"I am sorry if you are disappointed," said Dick.

"I'm not disappointed." Susan lifted her honest blue eyes to Dick, who quite towered above her. "I didn't care."

Dick laughed.

"I only wanted it to be somebody I knew," Susan added.

"Well, let's get acquainted and then it will be," her partner said.

After this Her Shyness began to have a good time. Dick was a nice boy, and as she went gayly away with him to take her place in the lancers, the unhappiness of a moment was forgotten. Opposite to her was Holliday, laughing as usual, but now her smiles and twinkles had some special cause, it would seem.

"The grandest joke!" she whispered at the first opportunity. "Look!" and she nodded towards the library, where in another set Susan saw Bessie and Charlie Willard dancing together.

She didn't know what the joke was exactly. It was all a puzzle, only it was plain Bessie had not succeeded in avoiding Charlie. Holliday was in a gale over it, and so was Charlie apparently. "I am awfully glad you traded," Holliday whispered in the grand right and left.

It was only after the tree had yielded up its burden of gifts—real gifts, for Mrs. Boone never did things by halves,—and Holliday and Susan were sitting side by side in the dining-room, that it was made clear.

"You see," whispered Holliday, "Bessie is crazy about Dick Seymour, and when she saw your card I suppose she remembered that it was the match for Dick's. We'd all been comparing them, you know; and that is why she wanted you to change with her."

"But she said it was because she was mad at Charlie," Susan interposed, "and she thought I wouldn't mind."

"Well, of course there was no particular harm in that. If she wasn't mad at Charlie then, she is now, for he changed cards too, and with Dick, of all people! Maybe Aline told Charlie about Bessie, or he found it out in some other way. But isn't it the funniest

thing you ever heard, that it should have happened so?"

It was funny, but it wasn't the fun of it that made Susan's cheeks so pink. She didn't at all understand why she had that half-ashamed feeling. Was it for herself or Bessie? At any rate, she was not sorry that Dick was her partner.

They made a merry little group in one corner of the big dining-room—Susan, Holliday and Elsie, with Dick and one or two other boys; and after a while Lily joined them, and then Charlie Willard. Browinski had done his best, and his best was something to remember.

"This is the grandest party I ever went to, Lily," Holliday said, as Dick dropped a handful of bonbons into her lap. "Look!" she added, "these have mottoes in them. "I am going to find an appropriate one for you, Charlie Willard."

"I have one for you," cried Charlie, who sat on the floor at her feet, and he handed up a tiny slip of paper.

"'Will you be mine?'" Holliday read aloud, amid great laughter, and promptly re-

turned the compliment with, “ ‘ You are too young.’ ”

“ I’d like to know how you make that out,” Charlie cried. “ I’m older than you are. Everybody is down on me this evening,” he added pensively. “ Bessie won’t even speak to me.”

Susan felt a little embarrassed over the one Dick gave her. “ You have beautiful eyes,” but she searched among her own collection till she found, “ You are very kind,” which was the best she could do, and which seemed to amuse Dick very much.

Just as supper was over Joe came in. Susan heard one of the older ladies ask Mrs. Boone who that handsome young man was, and she felt very proud of her good looking, popular brother. Joe did look well in evening clothes. He was going to take Miss Julia to her party.

“ How has my little sister been conducting herself? ” he asked Miss Kennedy, who had been as busy as a bee all evening, helping to keep things going and seeing that no one was left out.

She laughed. “ You need not worry about

Susan. She has had a beautiful time. I have been on the lookout for her, but she has not needed any help."

Yes, Lily's party was a great success. "I had the best time I ever had in all my life," Susan wrote in the red diary. She put Dick's motto away in a pretty lacquered box Holliday had given her, along with Aunt Henrietta's gold piece and the dainty gauze fan which was her gift from the tree.

Bessie seemed the only one who had not thoroughly enjoyed herself. Her black eyes snapped ominously, and she tossed her head scornfully when she passed Susan.

"Why, I haven't done the least thing to her," Susan said, puzzled.

Holliday laughed. "Bessie can't bear to have any one get ahead of her, and you did, though you didn't try, and it was all her own fault."

CHAPTER XVI

BY WAY OF ALLOY

“To all mortal blisses
From comfits to kisses
There’s sure to be something by way of alloy.”
—*Mrs. Whitney*, “Mother Goose for Grown Folks.”

ABOUT this time Mother wrote to Aunt Emily that Susan was really overcoming her diffidence. Miss Margaret’s class and Holliday’s friendship had done everything for her; and she went on to tell what a good time Susan was having at the skating rink.

It was all true until that unfortunate afternoon when something happened. On Susan’s table lay her Christmas books, as yet unread, except as she had dipped into them here and there and now and then. The bookworm was showing signs of becoming a butterfly, Father said.

The roller-skating rink played no small part in the pleasure of the holidays that year. The popularity of this amusement, which ebbs and flows, was then at its height, and Susan

and Holliday, fired with a desire to excel after seeing Joe and Miss Julia sweeping gracefully around the big circle at the rink, had practiced diligently in the Heywoods' attic. A few lessons from Joe, and they were well on the way to become accomplished skaters.

In this part of the country, where opportunities for ice skating were few, this inside sport was the best that offered.

"It is the loveliest fun in the world," Susan declared one afternoon when she and Holliday with crossed hands had made the circuit several times, and then dropped down on a bench to rest. On Susan's arm was the new bracelet, the sign and symbol, so to speak, of her emancipation.

While they sat there the Seymours came in. Marion and a girl who was visiting her, Elsie and Dick and Miss Duval, the governess. Marion was a handsome girl of seventeen, with her mother's haughty manner. She and her friend both had the air of wishing to keep to themselves. Elsie, as soon as she saw Susan and Holliday, came and sat beside them. She did not skate, she told them. Mamma thought she was not strong enough.

Gertie said Elsie had something the matter with her heart. She knew a great deal about the Seymours because one of the maids there was a friend of hers. Mrs. Maxwell said it was very wrong and ill-bred to listen to servants' gossip, but with one like Gertie it was difficult not to, and then everything you heard about Elsie was lovely. She was not hard to please, like her sisters. The servants all adored her and liked to wait on her.

She seemed quite content to sit and look on at the others, and while Susan was glad her own heart was all right, she felt it rather added to Elsie's charm to have so interesting a disease.

Dick was very polite to his sister's guest, but she and Marion stayed only a short time, and then he came and asked Susan to skate and showed her some new figures. It wasn't half so good as skating on ice, he said. Afterwards, while he took Holliday around, Susan talked happily to Elsie.

"I think you are the nicest girls I ever knew," Elsie exclaimed,—“you and Holliday.” And Susan felt deeply pleased.

After a little, Bessie and Lily arrived and put on their skates, and the atmosphere seemed

to change. Bessie had been queer ever since the party.

When Dick and Holliday came sailing back, Dick asked Lily, which was the polite thing to do, of course. Miss Duval said it was time to go home, and Elsie stood up reluctantly, begging to be allowed to wait and see what her brother was going to do.

Dick, it seemed, wanted one more round with Susan, who, uncomfortably conscious of Bessie's eyes, wished he would not ask her. She forgot them, however, when Dick said as they went off together, "You skate better than any girl I know, Susan." It was clear that he liked her, even better than Holliday, which seemed incredible.

The carriage was waiting for Elsie, and as Miss Duval preferred to walk, she took Holliday and Susan home. The Seymour carriage, with its beautiful matched horses and liveried coachman, was far grander than Mrs. Boone's. Good old-fashioned comfort was the latter lady's ideal. She didn't care for style, she said.

After this Holliday went away for a few days with her aunt, and Susan was left with-

out her protection. Otherwise what happened might have been avoided, for Holliday knew how to come to her friend's defense when Bessie's teasing went too far.

Aline asked Susan to teach her to skate, and Mrs. Maxwell invited her to come to dinner with Susan and go to the rink afterwards. Aline had been more agreeable of late. She really seemed to be learning a little politeness, Holliday said. She admired Susan's Christmas gifts, and told about her own, which were many and handsome. "I wish I could have a cat," she said, stroking Wynkyns, "but Aunt Adelaide hates pets. She hasn't forgiven me for going to see Cousin Anne. She won't let me come to town alone, ever. She and Miss Rogers are always watching."

"Did you tell her you were sorry?" Susan asked.

"No, I didn't; because I'm not. I am sorry for Cousin Anne because she is alone, like me. I am glad I went. Because her father and my great-grandfather quarreled isn't any reason against it."

Aline could not, or would not, see that she owed her aunt obedience, and yet you could

not help being sorry for the child, Mother told Miss Margaret.

Susan found the skating lesson more difficult than she expected, for Aline did not learn easily, and she was sitting down rather tired with her exertions, while one of the regular instructors undertook her task, when Bessie passed.

"I know what's the matter with Susan," she called.

"I am just tired," Susan replied, but Bessie's significant "I know, I know," when she came near again, was annoying.

The third time, Bessie sang out, "I know what's the matter with Susan! Dick's not here."

It would have been bad enough if Aline had been the only one to overhear, but there were ever so many people about. Miss Julia Anderson and the Poet, besides some girls and boys Susan knew. That troublesome color rushed to her face, but she retorted quite steadily, "I wouldn't be so silly, Bessie."

Bessie laughed and took up her refrain again, "I know, I know," and Aline, who had joined them, laughed too. "Let's go over to

Browinski's and telephone to Dick to come and cheer her up," she proposed.

"Oh, Bessie! Aline! please don't," cried Susan, terror-stricken.

"What are you teasing Susan about?" Miss Julia stopped to inquire of the amused group.

"Dick's Susan's sweetheart," said Bessie, "and we are going to telephone him to come and skate with her."

The big hall seemed swimming around Susan. She heard Miss Julia's gay "Don't mind them. They are teasing you," as she swept away with somebody who wasn't the Poet, for when Susan came to herself a little later, he sat gazing mournfully at her from the other end of the bench.

"Why should we mind?" he asked, then added, "But we do."

It would not have been so bad if Dick had not come, but he did, just as if he had been summoned. It was natural enough for Susan to suppose Bessie and Aline had done as they threatened, when she saw him. It was also natural for Dick, who knew nothing of what had occurred, and was besides a boy of spirit,

to be hurt and indignant by Susan's cold and distant manner.

No, she was not going to skate; she was going home; and this strange, sullen Susan turned her back squarely upon him, forgetting Aline was her guest, forgetting everything but her misery. The Poet was the only spectator.

It seemed to Susan she could never, never be happy again. Mother was out when she reached home, and only Wynkyns was there to console her, lying at ease before the dining-room fire. Susan dropped down on the rug and hid her face in his soft side. Wynkyns, aroused to the consciousness that he was extremely comfortable, broke into a purr.

"Oh, Wynkie, Wynkie," Susan moaned. "I hate Bessie and Aline, and I want to die. Yes, I do. It's wicked to hate people, but I can't help it."

When Holliday returned, having heard several versions of the incident, she questioned Susan. "Bessie is hateful," she owned, "but you let her see she can tease you, Susan. If you would only stand up for yourself. Of course she wouldn't have done such a thing as

telephone to Dick. You might have known."

"Didn't she?" Susan exclaimed, feeling relieved for a moment.

"Never you mind, Susan, I am going to tell Bessie what I think of her. She has been mad at you ever since the party, and there is no sense in it. I'd be ashamed to let everybody see I was so crazy about a boy. It wasn't your fault that you got him."

Then Dick didn't know why she had been so rude! That did not help matters much, Susan thought. "It is too horrid and silly for anything," she burst out, "to talk about being in love and sweethearts."

"Oh, well, everybody does it. You can't help that. You ought not to care so much what people say, Susan. It may be silly, but it isn't anything awful," said Holliday wisely.

Even to Holliday Susan couldn't bring herself to own how hateful she had been to Dick. No one knew except the Poet, unless Dick had told Elsie. Had he? He had gone back to school the next day. She tried in vain to think of some way by which she might sometime let him know how sorry she was that she had been so rude. What must he think?

Susan shed a great many tears over it in secret.

Bessie under the spur of Holliday's indignation made a sort of apology, which Susan received with quivering meekness. To her little volume of experience she added the sorrowful one of having tossed away from her a pleasant friendship because of what some one else thought or said. Mother did not know anything about it, so she did not have to take back what she had said to Aunt Emily. And after all it was true that Susan was by degrees overcoming her diffidence.

The festivities of the holidays being over, a return to the world of every day was in order, as Joe remarked. He had been extremely gay, but now he meant to get down to work again. He told Susan he had altered the plot of his story somewhat, and had some ripping ideas. To get fairly started he read her several chapters, which seemed to her quite wonderful. She felt certain Joe would some day be a great novelist. Susan found she could not go on being unhappy when there was still so much in life.

Joe, warbling one evening before the mirror as he tied his cravat, to the effect that memory

was the only friend that grief could call its own, was surprised to have the sentiment questioned.

“ It seems to me,” said Susan, “ that memory is as much an enemy as it is a friend. There are some things you’d rather forget.”

“ Listen to the infant, if you please!” cried Joe. “ Does she already feel the past a burden? Does she sigh for the waters of Lethe? ”

CHAPTER XVII

SELF AND SON

The old gray parrot hung head down,
And winked as at a joke.
“Look in a book,—Look in a book,”
These were the words he spoke.

“Look in a book; you’ll find it,” said the parrot encouragingly.

“Did you teach him to say that, Mrs. Self?” Susan asked.

“No, dearie; my son Johnnie, he brought him up from New Orleans, one time. It was the next to the last trip he ever took. He belonged to a bookstore man down there. He was going out of business. I reckon he must have taught him to say it.” Mrs. Self left it to her hearers to distribute her pronouns.

“Have you a son?” Miss Kennedy asked as she turned over some German books.

It was a bleak January day, with a prophecy of snow in the air, and within Self and Son’s it seemed gloomier than usual. Himself was sick abed, Herself explained with an apology

for keeping them waiting. "Yes, he had had a doctor," she said, "but the trouble was he hadn't any heart. And when you lose heart, doctoring don't do much good," she added.

For a second Susan thought it was the doctor who hadn't any heart, and wondered why Mrs. Self employed him. There was something about Miss Margaret that led people to speak of their troubles. Indeed, so warm was her sympathy that they were sometimes tempted to air them for more than they were worth. In response to her question Mrs. Self, adjusting her fascinator, and resting her arms upon a worn set of the "Lives of the Lord-Chancellors," related the tragedy of Self and Son. A poor little commonplace story, but touching, nevertheless.

"Self," she said, "wouldn't have the sign changed. Seems like he'd been that proud to put it up, he couldn't. It was twenty-eight years come next Easter. Johnnie didn't care for books. Self had planned to branch out and call it the Old and New Book Store. He always thought a heap of books, and knew right smart about them. But Johnnie was too lively to settle down to it. He said there was



"THE TRAGEDY OF SELF AND SON."

nothing in it. He tried it for a spell, and then he ran off and took to clerking on a steam-boat.

“Self said to let him go, and by-and-by he’d get tired and come back. Well, maybe you remember the burning of the *United States*? Though I guess you ain’t old enough. It was Johnnie’s boat. Another boat run into it in the fog, in the middle of the river one night. They told Self and me how Johnnie was real brave putting life preservers on other folks and not thinking of himself. Self was so sure he’d come back, but he didn’t look for it to be that way.” Mrs. Self paused to wipe her eyes, more from habit than because there were any tears in them.

She brought out a picture of Johnnie,—rather a flashy-looking youth, which made it seem likely that it was just as well he came back as he did with his record of being “real brave” in his last trying hour. It was not much wonder they had lost heart at Self and Son’s.

Having lost heart, they were in the way to lose everything else. There was a mortgage on the house, and since the tenant upstairs had

moved out they had fallen behind with the interest.

Miss Margaret asked who held the mortgage, but Mrs. Self could not remember the name. He was a very rich gentleman, she had heard.

"What will happen if they don't pay the interest?" Susan wished to know when they were out in the frosty air again.

"The house will have to be sold, I suppose," Miss Margaret replied with a sigh.

"I should think anybody would be ashamed to turn two old people out," Susan exclaimed.

As she spoke, Colonel Brand, accompanied by his dog, turned the corner. He had a monarch-of-all-I-survey air that was a trifle annoying. Miss Margaret bowed distantly. "I wonder if it could be he?" she said. "I hear he is buying a great deal of real estate."

"Joe doesn't like Colonel Brand, and neither do Holliday and I. He is cross," said Susan.

"We may be prejudiced, but certainly he looks cold and hard," Miss Margaret answered.

Nothing could have been pleasanter than to walk and talk thus confidentially with Miss

Margaret in the keen air, with an occasional snowflake blown against your cheek. Susan felt very happy, in spite of the memory of that wretched afternoon at the rink, the hurt of which was still fresh. She came very near telling Miss Margaret about it, but could not quite do it. She got as far as repeating what she had said to Joe about memory. Perhaps she thought this rather clever. To her surprise her companion was inclined to agree with the song.

“Memory is far more of a friend than an enemy, as you will see if you think about it,” she said. “For one thing we should not learn much if we at once forgot our wrong or foolish acts. Memory keeps us from repeating them.”

“But there are things you didn’t mean to do,—perhaps you did not understand, when you did them,—” Susan faltered.

“I know, dear, and I can tell you this for your comfort, that all of us without exception do things we regret,—that haunt us like ghosts.”

It was difficult to believe Miss Margaret could ever have had such an experience, still it

was comforting to have her say so. Perhaps she had an inkling of Susan's trouble. Miss Julia may have told her something, and she knew Bessie's propensity for teasing, as well as Susan's sensitiveness, for she went on to say that to forgive and not treasure the memory of the unkindnesses of others to us was a part of the digging we all had to do. Hard work that was sure to count in the end.

Miss Margaret's sermons were always short, and this one was interrupted by the approach of Mrs. Boone and Lily on their way to the dentist's. Lily very pensive, her grandmother very sympathetic.

Then, in front of Browinski's stood the Seymours' carriage, and who should come dancing out of it but Holliday, in her best clothes! Elsie's delicate face, beneath a big white plume, looked after her.

"Oh, Miss Margaret and Susan! what do you think? Mrs. Seymour says Elsie may come to our club. Isn't that too lovely?"

For the briefest minute a little jealous feeling crept into Susan's heart. "Holliday is going to like Elsie better than she likes me," she thought, but it was gone never to return, the

next instant, for when Elsie smiled on you you could no more be jealous of her than of the star that made you think of her.

Miss Margaret was evidently very much surprised, when Elsie, stepping out, added, "If you will have me, Cousin Margaret." But however much she might wonder, in view of the coldness her uncle and aunt had shown towards herself, she had only the warmest affection for Elsie. Besides, as she pointed out, it wasn't her club.

Holliday had been to a concert with Elsie. It seemed Mrs. Seymour and Aunt Nan had found each other out through mutual friends, and also that Elsie's mother was awakening to the fact that her daughter needed companionship.

That Elsie was allowed to become a member of the Circle of the Golden Thimble was not quite the tribute to the make-up of that organization that it seemed. Certain words of Dr. Thomas's explained it.

"Don't keep her in too closely," he had said. "Let her go about and make friends. If there is anything she greatly desires, I would gratify her,—if it is within reason."

The words struck a chill to Mrs. Seymour's heart. "Do you mean—?" she left her sentence unfinished.

"I only mean, madam, that she is, as you know, far from strong, that in building up the physical we must not overlook the part played by the mental. Elsie is lonely."

Dr. Thomas was a great friend of the Brocade Lady's, and he told her of this conversation himself.

So it came about that Elsie had those happy afternoons with the C. G. T. She refused to compete for the thimble. "You have your work all divided out," she said, "and I may go away next month. I'll just make something extra;" and she began at once fashioning a lace cap for Lenore.

She fitted in perfectly; the girls all made much of her, and treated her like a favored guest, particularly Aline, and her interest in all that concerned them was inspiring and flattering.

"How nice it is to know about so many people," she said one afternoon, when Miss Margaret was detained elsewhere and conversation took the place of "David Copperfield," rang-

ing from Miss Julia Anderson and the Poet to Christmas Tree House.

“And you never heard about the mysterious tree, Elsie?” cried Holliday.

“It is all silly stuff, Elsie,” Aline added.

“You can say so if you choose, but Susan and I know something, don’t we, Susan?”

Susan nodded. “I will tell you sometime, Elsie,” she said.

“Tell us now, please, Susan,” begged Lily.

“Well, Lily Boone, after the way your grandmother talked about Susan and me, I think we’d better not tell *you* anything. You are too nervous,” Holliday answered, laughing.

“Colonel Brand doesn’t like you to talk about his house, either,” put in Bessie.

“Grandma says there is a ghost in almost everybody’s pantry,” Lily announced. “It was because you took me in, Holliday, that I was frightened.”

“Took you in! Why, you took yourself,” cried Holliday. “And what do you mean by a ghost in a pantry?”

“I should think anybody would know,” Lily answered.

“What would a ghost be doing in a pantry?”

—yet I have heard something like that, somewhere,” Aline said, puzzled.

“Do you mean a skeleton in the closet, Lily?” asked Susan.

A shout arose at this.

Lily pouted. “I don’t care, there isn’t much difference; skeletons and ghosts are almost the same, aren’t they, Elsie?”

Elsie replied, laughing, that she wasn’t very well acquainted with ghosts. The soft color in her cheeks told how much she was enjoying herself.

“Anyway, Susan said *Gridironists*, and that was a great deal funnier. You always laugh at me more than anybody,” said the aggrieved Lily.

It was really through Elsie’s interest in them that the C. G. T. adopted the Selfs, and began to show them small attentions. It wasn’t much trouble, when once you thought of it, to run over with a bowl of soup or a loaf of fresh bread once or twice a week, and the old people were most appreciative. Elsie said “Self and Son” and the parrot made her think of a story-book.

Joe Maxwell said it was Colonel Brand who

held the mortgage on their house, and Margaret suggested to the Brocade Lady that she explain to him the state of affairs and ask him not to be too hard on the Selves. The Brocade Lady, for some reason, did not accept the suggestion graciously. "Do it yourself," she said.

Miss Kennedy had no intention of doing it herself. She did not like Colonel Brand, and could not forget certain words of his concerning her father which had been repeated to her. To ask anything that had in it the least hint of a favor was impossible, she thought. Yet so curiously do things come about that she did ask him, after all.

It was one Friday afternoon,—a freezy, thawy, snowy, rainy afternoon,—and the members of the C. G. T. were listening with eager attention to the fortunes of David, their heads bent over their work, when Colonel Brand was ushered in by Nancy and left to his fate. So absorbed was everybody that he stood unobserved for several seconds.

Miss Margaret was the first to look up, and seeing him remembered that the Brocade Lady had commissioned her to tell Nancy to show

the colonel into the dining-room if he came, and say she would be in in a very few minutes. She had forgotten it.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, “I am intruding;” and he looked so embarrassed that Miss Margaret was more gracious than she meant to be, as she conducted him across the hall and delivered the Brocade Lady’s message.

Miss Margaret had been rumpling her hair after a fashion she had when she was reading, till it was loose and wavy about her face, and with her white ruffled apron she was very Peggyish, as Joe would have said. This was perhaps why the colonel looked at her so intently from under his heavy eyebrows.

Susan, who had occasion to go into the hall for the handkerchief she had left in her coat pocket, heard the conversation. Miss Margaret, having ushered the colonel in, stood with her hand on the door and “David Copperfield” under her arm, and explained that a meeting of a little sewing circle was the reason for his exclusion from the sitting-room. And then some impulse moved her to do what she had declared she would not, and she added:

"By the way, Colonel Brand, do you know that little second-hand book place on Pine Street?"

The colonel believed he did, although he had never been inside.

"Then," said Miss Margaret, advancing a step and putting her hands in the pockets of her apron, "I should like to ask your interest in the two old people who live there. I have been told you hold a mortgage on the property."

Colonel Brand, who was more used to receiving interest than giving it, bowed and said, "Yes?"

"They are poor and old, and have little comfort or joy in life. Their only interest is in the shop, and I believe it will break their hearts if they have to give it up."

The colonel took out his note-book and pencil. "I'll speak to my agent and have it looked into," he replied, and Miss Margaret thanked him with a lovely smile.

Susan felt quite sure, as they went back to the sitting-room, that the Selfs would not be turned out. Of another thing she was sure too, and this was that Dick had not told Elsie.

Sometime when she had a good opportunity she meant to tell Elsie herself, and ask her to explain to Dick.

The Brocade Lady found her visitor staring absently into the fire. "What is this I hear about a strange, dark man in your house at Christmas time?" she demanded abruptly.

It was not to be wondered at that the colonel looked surprised and did not reply at once. When he did speak it was to say, as he flicked a bit of lint from his coat sleeve, "Except the care-takers, there was no one there when I left, nor when I returned."

The Brocade Lady continued, "And I hear several persons claim to have seen the famous Christmas tree that night. I am not telling you this to annoy you, but that you, for your own good, may run these stories down and settle the matter. Why don't you investigate?"

"I can't conceive what there is to investigate," the colonel said testily. "There is no Christmas tree in my house, I assure you; for the present I do not expect to use those east rooms, and I shall give orders that the shutters are not to be left open, so that no one will have

any excuse for pretending to see what does not exist.”

The colonel was stubborn; he might have ended the mystery in a short time if he had not been so certain that there wasn't any.

CHAPTER XVIII

“FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE”

You will find that you must
Take a good deal on trust,
In a world somehow planned
So you can't understand.

ON a certain page in the red diary Susan has recorded, “Sometimes when your feelings get hurt it is because you don't understand.” The way in which she arrived at this wise conclusion was through accepting Sophy Idelle's invitation to view the wedding cake.

“Oh, say, Holliday, you and Susan come over this afternoon and see the cake and things, and maybe Grandpa will give us something good.” Sophy, waiting on the corner after school, thus accosted the girls. Like everybody else she admired Holliday greatly, and paid court to her in various sweet ways,—so Joe put it.

There were times when Holliday seemed to like Sophy Idelle. She enjoyed variety in her friends, and besides she liked sweet things.

Susan liked them too, and she did not mind Sophy so much since she was no longer afraid of being called Miss Philadelphia. If Holliday went, she wanted to go.

The wedding in question was to be a particularly grand one, and everybody who was anybody at all was asked to the church; afterwards there was to be a large but more exclusive reception at the house.

“Susan, I don’t know that I care to have you visiting Sophy Idelle,” Mother said. “I thought you did not like her.”

“I don’t, so very much, Mother, but Holliday’s going. We want to see the cake. Sophy says it is perfectly beautiful. She begged us to come.”

Mrs. Maxwell rather reluctantly consented. “But, Susan, do not hang around the store,” she cautioned her. “It does not look well.”

It was easy to say “don’t hang around the store,” but when their hostess elected to hang, Susan felt helpless in the matter. But for Mother’s admonition she would have enjoyed it, for those marble halls had never lost their fascination for her. If it was pleasant to be there in the guise of a simple purchaser, it was

doubly delightful to have the freedom of the place under Sophy's leadership; to stroll behind the counters and talk familiarly with Miss Mary and Miss Carry, and even sample the contents of certain candy jars.

Holliday was in her gayest humor, and her laugh rang out, perhaps a little too unrestrainedly, for a public place. Tom Mann, Bessie's brother, came in with another High School boy, and they stopped and talked with Holliday and Sophy Idelle across the counter. Susan, remembering Mother's charge, took refuge behind a tall case of favors, and wished the boys would go.

Holliday begged to be allowed to wait on them, and much merriment ensued. Other purchasers stopped to look at her in amused admiration. Susan, peeping through the glass, knew she ought not to do it. But how pretty she was! And you could see the difference between her and Sophy Idelle. Holliday thought only of the fun of it; while Sophy was bridling and behaving like a goose.

After an interminable time the boys left, and Susan came out of her place of retirement. Sophy and Holliday were talking to Miss

Carry, and as Susan approached she heard Sophy say in a loud whisper, "Don't tell her." Holliday laughed.

"Don't tell me what?" asked Susan.

"Oh, nothing," answered Holliday, with merry eyes.

"It is awfully interesting, isn't it?" giggled Sophy, "but we can't tell you." Her air of intimacy with Holliday was very distasteful to Susan.

"You will tell me, Holliday, won't you?" she said confidently, for was not this one of their promises to each other?

Holliday shook her head. "Indeed I can't, Susan. You'll know it sometime, but I can't tell you now."

"That is silly," Susan spoke crossly.

Holliday tossed her head. "It would not be right; would it, Miss Carry?"

"You wouldn't like it if she did tell you," Sophy Idelle put in.

"No, you wouldn't," Holliday agreed, and Miss Mary nudged Miss Carry and they laughed.

"Your mother wouldn't like it, either," added Sophy Idelle, and Holliday laid on the

last straw, and made a bad matter worse, by saying, "The truth is, Susan, you aren't old enough yet to know this."

As Holliday was just three months older than Susan, this seemed both cutting and absurd. Susan felt she would never have treated Holliday so. She knew they were teasing, and she would not have cared if Holliday, her own friend, had not joined in.

By this time the cake was ready to view, and in the marvel of its glistening white towers and wedding bells, and the tiny bridal pair just entering the door below, Susan for a time forgot her grievance. Browinski, in apron and cap, danced excitedly about issuing orders to the men ready to carry it forth.

"Vell, young ladies,—dese iss peautiful. Iss it not so? How you likes my composure, eh?"

They liked it extremely. Holliday said it was prettier than any she had ever seen in New Orleans.

"Some day I makes one for you. Iss it not so?" the confectioner said, laughing, and Holliday replied merrily, "Yes, indeed, Mr.

Browinski. I'll engage you now. Don't forget.”

When the cake and accompanying dainties had been started off, Browinski bestowed a cream puff upon each of them,—a luscious, oozing affair which it was impossible to eat with any dignity whatever. Afterwards Sophy Idelle took them upstairs, where they met her mother, who seemed merely a plumper, louder edition of Sophy.

The Browinskis' apartment was very fine, with a truly astonishing number of scarfs and throws and tidies, painted tambourines, and three-legged stools. Even Sophy Idelle's cologne bottles were dressed up in blue satin with hand-painted roses.

Susan went home alone, for Holliday decided to stay and see them pull candy. As she walked listlessly along, her grievance returned in full force, and with each step she grew more injured and unhappy. To think that Holliday would join with Sophy Idelle in keeping a secret from her.

Mother had a caller in the parlor; in the dining-room a pleasant fire was wasting itself on the desert air, with not even Winkyns to en-

joy it. Through the bookcase doors old friends gave kindly greeting; friends who were always the same, ready to soothe and divert, and confide their best secrets. Father's big leather chair gave a hospitable invitation; the old jardinières, the silver candlesticks, and the bronze fishwoman united in a voiceless chorus which told her to forget the tiresome outside world and find comfort here.

Quiet, homey corners are best after all, Susan thought as she accepted the chair,—if only Holliday hadn't— The fire crackled and purred, and gleamed more and more brightly as the twilight deepened. Susan tried to catch the rhythm of its song, but it baffled her, till she stopped trying, when presently she floated away upon it to the border of the dream world. From the bookcase doors now stepped odd figures,—story-book people,—stretching themselves and exchanging compliments. There were Charles the First out of Macaulay, and Betsy Trotwood; Lady Macbeth and Robin Hood, and presently Sophy Idelle and Colonel Brand got into it somehow. The Colonel was insisting that his house was not haunted, when Grandpa Browinski appeared

with a big knife, which he waved at Susan, telling her to put on her blue dress, for he was going to cut off Holliday's head.

Susan felt this punishment was too extreme, and was trying to say so, when it all faded and Mother's voice said, "If you are going to the wedding, you must change your dress before tea."

That was a very grand wedding, indeed. Old St. Mark's was still in its Christmas greens, and the lights and the music and the handsomely dressed people whom the white-gloved ushers seated so ceremoniously, made it all as good as a play to the inexperienced Susan. Joe was among the ushers, and so was the Poet. Across the church Holliday sat with her father, and Colonel Brand came in with Miss Seymour. Joe took them under the white ribbon, giving his arm to Miss Josephine, and chatting with her as they went up the aisle, the Colonel stalking behind. Susan decided that Joe was the best-looking usher of them all.

Then came the moment, almost terrible, when the music stopped, and then as suddenly began again with the strains of the wedding

march. The church throbbed with expectancy. The ushers advanced slowly, two by two, and then the bridesmaids, among them Miss Julia. Last of all the bride on her father's arm, a mysterious, spiritualized being, beneath her gauzy veil. Susan knew her only by sight, but she adored her for being so beautiful to-night. She did not remember the groom till the service was half over.

She quite forgot to be stiff with Holliday in the interest of talking over the wedding next day, and Holliday appeared unaware that there was any occasion for stiffness.

"I am going to have ten bridesmaids," she announced, "and I am going to marry an officer in a splendid uniform, and have some of his army friends for ushers, like my cousin Grace in New Orleans."

"Where are you going to get him?" Aline asked.

"Get him!" Holliday repeated indignantly. "I didn't say I was going to *get* him, Aline. That is a very disagreeable thing for you to say. I am going to marry him when he asks me." Turning her back upon Aline, she continued, "Susan is to be my maid of honor."

"Unless I get married first," Susan suggested.

Holliday looked surprised. "I thought you said you weren't going to get married at all."

"But I might," said Susan.

"Susan wouldn't walk up the aisle by herself, anyway," added Bessie.

Holliday seemed disconcerted.

At recess she and Susan borrowed a prayer book from the chapel and read the marriage service over. They were very much impressed. "'For better for worse, for richer for poorer,'" Holliday repeated dreamily.

When you are thinking particularly of anything, you are sure to come upon references to it. The next morning Holliday whispered to Susan: "I have found the loveliest poetry in one of the little blue Longfellow's. I shall not show it to any one but you. Aline and Bessie wouldn't appreciate it; but maybe we'll tell Elsie."

Certainly Holliday did care most for her, Susan thought happily. It was strange about that secret with Sophy Idelle.

The lines Holliday had found were from the
“Golden Legend”:—

“In life’s delight,
In death’s dismay,
In storm and sunshine,
Night and day,
Here and hereafter
I am thine.”

They read them after school, sitting in Miss Margaret’s window together, with clasped hands. The others had gone, and only Miss Margaret remained, busy with some papers at the other end of the room. The sun shone warmly in, and the words on the Wise Man’s gravestone stood out clear and distinct, “Who built his house upon a rock.”

“In storm and sunshine”—

“Why, it is just the same with friends as with getting married,” Susan thought. You go on loving your friends even if they do hurt your feelings. They too are for better for worse. She felt as if she had been making a solemn promise.

A few days later,—it happened to be Satur-

day,—Susan had a birthday. When she had opened the gifts piled up at her plate on the breakfast table, she supposed the celebration was over. Holliday had said she was going somewhere to lunch, and Susan felt disappointed that she was not to see her on her birthday. Still, she had so much to be thankful for, she told herself, that she must not mind this.

About eleven o'clock, Mother sent her on an errand, and when she returned, Silvy, who opened the door, said she was to change her dress as quickly as possible, for there was to be company for dinner.

Of course Susan suspected it had something to do with her birthday, particularly when she found her blue dress laid out on the bed. She slipped into it and tied her blue ribbons in a happy state of excitement.

She heard a murmur of voices as she descended the stairs, and when she opened the parlor door, with a sudden feeling of timidity, she released a chorus of greetings. It seemed quite impossible that five throats could, otherwise unaided, produce such a volume of sound.

Above all the rest Holliday could be heard, saying, "You didn't ask me where I was going, Susan. If you had, I should have said, 'To Elsie's,' because I was going by for her."

The table in the dining-room, to which they were presently summoned, was beautiful with lighted candles, a centerpiece of pink roses, and Mother's prettiest china and silver.

At each plate was a card with a flower painted on it, and the name of the one for whom it was meant. Lily had her name flower, Bessie a tulip, Aline carnations, Holliday a red rose, Elsie violets, Susan daisies.

In the kitchen was Mammy Ria, which is all that need be said about the lunch, and Mother and Miss Margaret peeped through the pantry door at the merry party, while Silvy went back and forth. When at length the cake appeared with its thirteen lighted candles, after Silvy followed Robin Bright, looking very eager. Robin had a way of scenting parties.

"Merry Christmas, Susan," he cried. "May I have some ice cream, please?"

He was given a place of honor beside the hostess, and allowed to take his turn at blowing

out the candles, and when everybody had settled down to the business in hand, Holliday said, “Susan, do you remember the secret Sophy Idelle wouldn’t tell you? Well, this is it. The cake. Miss Carry told us your mother ordered it. You see you weren’t old enough to know it, were you?”

So this time the “worse” had been largely in her own imagination. Now she knew all about it, it seemed a very harmless bit of teasing. This is how Susan came to make that entry in the red diary.

CHAPTER XIX

AMONG OTHER THINGS

However practical your bent,
You need a little sentiment.

HOLLIDAY was late at school one morning, and as she took her place she seemed different from her usual self. The sparkle was gone; she was at one moment a languid, at the next a tragic Holliday, and her eyes showed traces of tears. Susan regarded her with concern. It was as if some great barrier had risen up between them.

Holliday, however, was not one to keep her sorrows locked in her own heart indefinitely. After school, while they lingered a little till Lily and Bessie were some distance ahead, she burst out with, "Oh, Susan, I have had the most terrible time! I shall never get over it. I wish I were dead."

Susan's imagination failed her. What could the trouble be? She squeezed Holliday's hand sympathetically, and waited for enlightenment.

"Papa is simply raging, Susan. He said dreadful things to me," Holliday went on.

This was astonishing, indeed, for if ever an indulgent parent existed, it was Mr. Heywood.

"Why, Holliday, what have you done?" Susan asked, aghast.

"It all comes of going to see Sophy Idelle that afternoon," wailed Holliday. "I am sure I don't care a cent for Sophy, and I wish I'd never seen Browinski's."

By slow degrees the facts came out. An acquaintance of Mr. Heywood's, meeting him, had remarked, "By the way, Heywood, I saw that pretty daughter of yours selling candy over Browinski's counter. If they regularly employ her, I prophesy a boom in the business." Shocked and astonished, Mr. Heywood sought an explanation from his child.

"Do you think it was so perfectly dreadful, Susan?" Holliday asked. "I know you wouldn't have done it, but it was just fun."

Susan hesitated. "I don't suppose I should have thought about it at all, only Mother said not to hang around the store,—that it wasn't nice."

“And that was why you hid behind the showcase! Why didn’t you tell me, Susan? I suppose if I had a mother, I wouldn’t have done it. Papa said it was a bold-faced thing. Think of his saying that!”

“But, Holliday, you weren’t like Sophy Idelle,—not a bit. She was—silly, dreadfully.”

“It is very good of you to say so,” Holliday spoke with extreme meekness. “Papa wanted to know if you were there, and when I said you were behind the showcase, he said you were too much of a lady. And Susan, I am not allowed to go to Browinski’s for a month, and not anywhere except to school, for a week, and really I thought he was going to say only bread and water to eat.” Holliday giggled excitedly. “It was bad enough to have him scold me, but when he began to blame himself and say he ought to have sent me to boarding school, only he was selfish, and I was all he had,—that made me cry like everything.”

Susan was very sorry for her friend, and when, after hearing the story Mother said, “I think it is partly your fault, Susan, for if you had said plainly that you were told not to stay

in the store, Sophy would have taken you upstairs," she gladly accepted a share of the blame.

The keenness of her father's displeasure bewildered Holliday. Like many seemingly easy-going persons, when he was stirred to wrath it was deeply, and now it was in proportion to his fondness for her and his pride in her beauty and brightness.

"Of course it was wrong, I suppose, but it wasn't breaking one of the Ten Commandments," she said to Miss Margaret, for naturally it was talked over with her.

"The moral law is not the only law," Miss Margaret replied, smiling. "There is what we know as convention, established usage, a sort of unwritten law that grows out of general opinion and feeling about certain things. It is generally founded in real wisdom, and to defy it needlessly is dangerous and foolish. Good manners come under this head. The general opinion is that persons of refinement and self-respect will not do anything to attract attention to themselves in public places. You did it thoughtlessly, but you have learned your lesson, I am sure." Miss Margaret

caressed the bright head that leaned against her shoulder.

Holliday sighed. "I think life is very hard," she said. "It was only fun."

People are different in this world. It astonished Susan that after the first tragic moments were over, Holliday could laugh about her punishment, could refer to it frankly before people. "I can't go to Browinski's, you know, because I sold some candy to Tom Mann, just for fun. Papa won't let me." In her place Susan wouldn't have mentioned it for the world. Yet, strangely, it seemed to add to Holliday's charm. She was laughed at and petted and admired all the more. The Brocade Lady was right when she said there was always applause for Holliday. But then she was such a dear!

It was on the occasion of this conversation with Miss Margaret that Holliday discovered that heart-shaped box on her dressing table. Up to this time, lovely as she was, Miss Kennedy had been to them merely one set apart to be their teacher and friend; but now, as Holliday told Susan about it, they suddenly saw her in a new light.

“She told me to go up to her room and wait for her, and to amuse myself, so you don’t think I was meddlesome, do you? On her work table was the prettiest little poetry book, and on the fly leaf was, ‘Miss Peggy, from J. M.’”

Susan understood. She had almost forgotten Peggy and the pink sunbonnet, but now she recalled it and told Holliday.

“Mr. Joe and Miss Margaret! Oh, goody!” cried Holliday, hugging her knees ecstatically.

Susan had come over to console the prisoner and spend the afternoon, and they were indulging in the most unconventional attitudes on the big divan in the library, public opinion not being present to criticise them.

“I wonder if she—?” Susan began, tucking a rose-colored pillow behind her head.

“Why, Susan Maxwell, of course she does—like him, do you mean? Why, Mr. Joe is a perfect dear! I’d like to marry him myself.”

“Then you would be my sister. How funny! Do you know, Holliday, I believe Joe has been reading the story to Miss Margaret.

A number of times I have seen him going out after tea with a roll of something in his overcoat pocket."

And so they went on to construct a romance. "No love stories while school is going on," was Miss Margaret's rule, but it could not be very well applied to real live ones.

The wedding mentioned in the last chapter had fanned their interest in things sentimental, and on every hand fuel was to be had to feed the flame. There were Miss Julia Anderson and the Poet, who certainly carried his heart on his sleeve, and who had a rival in a Chicago man. Then Bessie's cousin lost her lover and put on black for him. Here was another phase of the subject.

"I shouldn't want everybody to know my lover had died, would you?" Susan asked. It seemed to her rather courting observation on the part of Bessie's cousin, and yet she enjoyed playing the part of observer.

"Why, yes, I should," Holliday answered. "I think you are funny about not liking to tell things, Susan."

Susan felt that very probably she was, but she couldn't help it.

Joe was much like Holliday in not keeping either his joy or sorrow to himself. "Say, Susie—" he began one evening, finding her sitting alone in the firelight, and dropping down beside her. Then for some moments he got no further.

Of late Susan had taken to dreaming in the firelight, instead of having a light the minute night began to fall and going on with some book. "Well?" she inquired.

"I want to ask you something." Joe lifted her hand and rubbed his prickly cheek against it. "Does old Bright hang around much?"

"Why, Joe, do you mean our Mr. Bright? Aren't you ashamed! Why, no. That is—why, yes, he is there sometimes. At school, you mean? Pretty often, I guess. He has things to do at the church."

"Oh, I understand," said Joe ironically.

So here was the rival necessary in every satisfactory love story!

"But Joe, I think," Susan began with a sisterly desire to console and encourage, "—that is, I imagine, he comes to see how Robin is getting on. "

"All I have to say to that, Susie, is that

your imagination does you credit," said Joe.

Susan only half took in the compliment. She was thinking. Mr. Bright! It had never occurred to any of them. Yet he certainly was there rather often about closing time, now she thought of it. "Isn't he pretty old?" she asked.

"Not much more than thirty," Joe answered gloomily. "Women have the greatest fancy for preachers, somehow."

Susan's heart seemed beating out loud, as she said very low, "But I am sure she likes you best, Joe."

Perhaps this opinion had no very firm foundation, but Joe found it comforting. "You are a good little Susie," he said, patting the hand he still held.

The Brocade Lady's eyes were also being opened about this time. Was there any danger of Margaret's falling in love with Joe Maxwell? was the way she put it. She was not blind to his attractions. He had good manners and was amusing, she allowed, but when Margaret added "generous and whole-souled," she demurred. "Mr. Joseph Maxwell has yet to prove himself," she said.

When one is lonely and sad, a big, kindly, sympathetic friend is not to be scorned, and flowers and candy and books help to brighten the way. Joe's strongest appeal was, however, by means of his story. Margaret had dreams of writing herself, and it pleased her to think she could help some one else by advice and criticism.

As for the rector, the Brocade Lady liked him very much, yet she was not sure he was clever enough for her Margaret.

On the fourteenth of February, which came in about this time, Holliday and Lily each had a valentine postmarked from the Eastern town where Dick Seymour went to school. Susan tried not to care, but she wasn't very successful.

That same day Miss Margaret received a note from Colonel Brand. Whether he meant it for a valentine or not, he didn't say, but it was most satisfactory as far as it went, for it assured Miss Kennedy that an arrangement would be made by which the Selfs should have their present home undisturbed so long as they needed it, and was signed, "Very respectfully yours, Sidney M. Brand."

CHAPTER XX

ELSIE

“The memory of what has been.”

—*Wordsworth.*

“WOULDN'T it be fun to take Lenore to see Susie Flynn when she gets clothes enough?” It was Elsie who made this suggestion as she slipped a little skirt over the doll's head. Lenore had to endure frequent tryings-on.

“You know,” she continued, “Aline and I went to see her yesterday and took her some picture books. We told her about the doll and she was awfully interested. Wasn't she, Aline?”

“That's a lovely idea, Elsie,” said Holli-day; and Susan added: “Of course, when you can't go anywhere, even a doll makes a pleasant variety.”

“Even a doll!” repeated Bessie, “as if she wasn't the grandest doll in the world!”

Having adopted the Selfs, the C. G. T's. had gone a few doors farther along and taken

in Susie Flynn. She was a dear little girl about ten years old, with a bright face and an eager mind, but through some spinal trouble unable to walk a step.

To Elsie it had been a great event when with much hesitation her mother had at length consented to her going to see Susie. Mrs. Seymour didn't like to have Elsie go into strange places that might not be clean, and to the musty, dusty atmosphere of Self and Son's she had some reason to object; but the Flynn's cottage was another matter, and having been convinced of this she gave in, only stipulating that Miss Duval, the governess, should go with the girls.

If Elsie did not grow stronger, she was brighter and happier in these days. "I love people,—all sorts of people," she explained, to the bewilderment of her father and mother. That their darling youngest child should have such tastes was perplexing indeed, to their exclusive souls. They were inclined to lay the blame upon that objectionable little school which Margaret Kennedy had opened at their very door.

The Circle agreed that so soon as the stage

of Lenore's wardrobe warranted, they would in a body take her to see Susie Flynn, and this gave them an added incentive to work hard.

The next Friday afternoon Elsie did not come to the meeting, and Lily said Mrs. Seymour told her grandmother they were going to take her away. This announcement created consternation. They had grown so fond of Elsie.

Miss Margaret was a charmer in her way, and Holliday in her's, but Elsie's way was different from either. Her faculty for forgetting herself in her interest in what others were doing or saying was unusual. All these new friends of hers were perhaps dimly conscious of something which lay like the thinnest of veils between her and them, and made her different. This something, which could not be defined, had its effect upon them all, especially Aline.

"Aline is just crazy about her," Holliday said.

"We all are," Susan added.

"When you try to tell people about Elsie, it sounds goody-goody," Holliday continued, "and she isn't a bit."

"I do think she is better than we are, but it seems as if she didn't have to try," Susan said with a sigh.

Probably there was no more goodness, no stronger desire for truth and purity in Elsie's heart than in the hearts of the others, but the light within her shone out more clearly, because it was undimmed by an imperious self that must be always asserting its own importance. However it was, she brought out the best in her friends. Aline's sharp speeches were less frequent when she was there, Bessie did not brag so much, Lily forgot to whine and Susan to be self-conscious.

They did not take Elsie away. Instead, a celebrated physician from New York came to see her. This seemed alarming, but the next day when they came out of school, she was at her window and waved to Susan and Holliday. After this almost every day they would see her delicate little face peeping out from between the lace curtains and watching for them. They began to be reassured. The great New York doctor must be helping her.

She did not get strong enough to come back to the Circle, however, but one day Miss Mar-

garet brought word that Elsie wished to see them all and her mother thought they might come, one or two at a time, for half an hour.

She had just returned from the Seymours', where she had gone upon her aunt's request, in response to Elsie's wish. Margaret had thought she would never again enter her uncle's door, he had spoken so unkindly of her father and so harshly resented her determination to support herself, but she could not refuse Elsie. No one could,—not even her arrogant father.

Susan had never been in the Seymours' house, and when it came to be her turn and Holliday's to go, she rather shrank. She hoped they would not see Mrs. Seymour or Marion. She felt herself a very small mouse indeed as they went up the beautiful winding staircase, with its broad, shallow steps, Miss Duval, who was not alarming, leading the way. Holliday, of course, did not feel so at all.

At sight of Elsie all embarrassment was forgotten, for though she was on a couch with pillows about her she did not look very ill. She held out both hands to them, and was very happy over their coming. She wished to



"SHE WAS VERY HAPPY OVER THEIR COMING."

know how Lenore's wardrobe was progressing, and was quite sure she would be well enough to go with them when they were ready to take her to see Susie Flynn.

Only two days later, one Saturday morning, Holliday came running in with a strange excitement shining in her eyes. "Oh, Susan, Elsie is dead!" she cried. "She died early this morning." Tears gathered in Holliday's eyes and overflowed. "Think of it, Susan!"

Susan looked at her in a dazed, uncomprehending way. It could not be true. Why, Elsie had been talking to them only day before yesterday. She had promised to go with them to Susie's. It was incredible.

Death had never before come so near Susan. Holliday was more familiar with it. She could talk about it, and about Elsie, but Susan was silent before the great mystery.

Life went on just the same; there were lessons and other duties, but through them all Holliday's words, "Elsie is dead," kept repeating themselves.

That afternoon she and Holliday had occasion to pass the Seymours'. The blind was down in Elsie's window, from which she had

waved to them so lately, and on the door, from beneath a wreath of roses, something soft and white fluttered gently in the breeze.

At the next corner they met Sophy Idelle, who remarked bluntly, "Say, Elsie Seymour is dead, isn't she?"

Holliday replied, "Yes," and they turned away. What had Sophy Idelle to do with Elsie?

Mrs. Seymour wished Elsie's friends to come to the service, which was held at the house. Aline refused to go. She couldn't bear funerals, she said. Mrs. Boone was to take Bessie and Lily, so Holliday and Susan went with Miss Margaret.

There was something strange about the familiar street as they walked along it that morning. At the Seymours' the door opened softly, as if by magic, to admit them, and the wide hall was full of a mysterious quiet, mingled with the odor of flowers. The solemnity was like a weight upon them.

They went into the drawing-room, where there were chairs arranged in rows, and sat down, but presently Miss Duval came in and spoke to Miss Margaret, who rose and mo-

tioned to Susan and Holliday to follow her. They passed through the open doors into the next room, where there were more flowers. Susan, bewildered by the dim light and the strangeness, did not at first understand when they paused before something long and white. Holliday clasped her hand, and some one opened a shutter, letting in a ray of sunlight. Then she saw.

Ah, the wonder and beauty of it! The dark lashes on the white cheek, the peaceful smile, the perfect rest there among the flowers. If this were death, it was not terrible at all. Susan's heart almost burst with a longing she did not understand. She wished she might look forever, but Miss Margaret led the way back to the drawing-room.

People came in softly and took seats, till the room was filled, then out of the mysterious hush rose the words, "I am the resurrection and the life." Susan's throat ached, but she did not cry, as Holliday did. Some one in front of her moved and for a minute she saw Dick's face, set and stern. It caused her a pang. She had wanted to tell Elsie, and now it was too late. This was a new and terrible

thought,—that it could be too late to explain things. And now her own tears fell.

“For we know,” the voice went on, “that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

The triumphant words stirred the flower-scented air. “For we know,”—they linked themselves with the story of the Wise Man. “Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man who built his house upon a rock.”

Elsie’s house had been built of gentle words and deeds. It had not had to endure any hard storms, yet it had its own beautiful meaning, its own part in the great plan.

It was over, and they were out in the sunshine again. That strange, unreal sunshine. In front of them walked Colonel Brand with the Brocade Lady. “Faith has a logic of its own, Sidney,” she was saying. “It looks not upon the things that are seen, but upon the things that are unseen.”

A little farther on Sophy Idelle joined them. She regarded them enviously and wanted to hear about the funeral.

“Sophy Idelle,” Holliday said, “Susan and

I don't want to talk to you about Elsie. You didn't know her."

Sophy was indignant. "I don't see what makes you so touchy," she cried. "She wasn't any kin of yours."

At Holliday's gate they met Robin. "Hello! Susan. Hello! Holliday," he said. "Did you know Elsie has gone to heaven?" and he added wistfully, "Say, don't people ever come back from heaven?—not ever?"

They didn't mind Robin as they did Sophy Idelle, but it seemed to them they could never again be anything but grave.

"I wonder if we shall live to be grown, Susan?" Holliday said. "Sometimes I think I shan't. If anything happens to me, I want you to have my diamond ring."

"Oh, Holliday!" cried Susan, whose thought had been following the same path, "I'd much rather not have you die. If you do, I want to die too."

They did not forget Elsie, but the very next day life began to move on in the same old way and they were soon as merry as before. To remember does not necessarily mean to be sad.

At school they often talked about her, all of them but Aline.

"Sometimes I think she is sorrier about Elsie than any of us," Susan remarked.

"Do you suppose it is that that makes her so cross?" asked Holliday.

It was true; Aline was in these days more difficult than ever.

Elsie's death had its effect upon them all. Bit by bit they were each accumulating experience. This helped to make more real those unseen things of which the Brocade Lady spoke.

To Susan, as she stood up to sing in church, the lines of the old hymn—

"And in God's house forever more
My dwelling place shall be"—

brought a thrill, for God's house was where Elsie was, and it no longer seemed distant and vague.

The thought of Dick Seymour made her sad. He had been so fond of Elsie. Miss Margaret said her death was a great shock to him. He had been quite unprepared for it. And now there was no way by which he could ever know she had not meant to be rude. At least, Susan couldn't think of any.

CHAPTER XXI

APRIL FOOL

Oh, April Fool, don't mind, keep cool;
The lesson's good to learn;
For if you wait, as sure as Fate,
Sometime will come your turn.

"Now what do you think Aline has done?" Bessie exclaimed, as she opened her work-bag. "You know she promised us those two sets of paper dolls for our table at the bazaar, and now she has gone and given them both away; one to Susie Flynn."

"Oh, but she'll make some more, won't she?" asked Susan, diving under the sofa for her spool.

"She says she won't. She is tired of the Circle, but her aunt makes her come."

The Circle of the Golden Thimble had decided to give whatever they made on the sale of their doll to the new infirmary, and at the Easter Fair to be held for its benefit they were to have a table of their own, of which Lenore

would be the central feature. Other things would be necessary, however, and they were counting upon Aline's paper dolls.

"I think Aline is very tiresome," said Holliday, and Lily added, "I think she is mean."

"Here she comes," said Bessie. "You ask her about the dolls, Susan."

"Aunt Nan is going to send me some lovely doilies," Holliday announced as Aline entered with her usual indifferent air.

"Then with the sweet-pea lamplighters, and your mother's laundry lists, Bessie, and the wash cloths, and the magazine covers Miss Julia promised, and Aline's dolls, we shall have enough, I guess," said Susan.

"You needn't count on my dolls; I have given them away," said Aline.

"Why, Aline Arthur, you promised!" cried Holliday.

"I didn't promise. I just said you might have them if—"

"If what? I didn't hear anything about an 'if,' did you, Bessie?"

"If I felt like giving them to you when the time came, but I don't. That's all."

"She has lost interest because she knows she

isn't going to get the prize." Bessie spoke in a whisper, but Aline heard.

"I suppose you think nobody can get a prize when you are around," she retorted.

Miss Margaret's entrance cleared the sky for the time being. Bessie was rather confident, but general opinion upheld her in it. She had a natural talent for needlework; her gathers were almost equal to the Brocade Lady's own, and her buttonholes as good as embroidery, Holliday said.

There had been, it must be owned, occasional bursts of ill feeling over Lenore's clothes. The Brocade Lady was very strict, and work must be up to a certain standard. Susan's, perhaps, came next to Bessie's. Aline's sewing was uneven, some of it beautifully done, some very poor.

"When you can do so well, dear, why do you waste your time doing so badly?" Miss Margaret had asked gently.

"I always do the best I can," Aline declared crossly. It was quite evident her interest in the Circle had faded, and if her aunt had not insisted that she must continue in what she had undertaken, she would have given it

up. The one thing she seemed to care for now was to visit Susie Flynn.

Elsie's plan of taking the doll to Susie had been carried out, and her delight in it went almost beyond words. They all thought of Elsie that afternoon and missed her gentle voice, her happy laugh. Lenore wore the little lace cap her fingers had fashioned, with the blue rosettes she had sewed on so happily the last time she had met with them. They said, as they had said so many times, how strange it seemed that she would never be with them any more. All but Aline. She did not care to talk of Elsie as the others did.

Susie's wistful pleasure in the doll inspired Aline's gift.

"It is very nice of you to give Susie the paper dolls, Aline," Holliday said, going back to the subject, while Miss Margaret found the place in "David Copperfield," "but it isn't fair to give her the ones you promised us."

"I hadn't time to make any more, and Susie loves them."

"I think Aline would like to give Lenore to Susie," Susan remarked, laughing.

"If some rich person would only buy her

and make a present of her to Susie, that would be lovely," said Lily.

"If nobody buys her, what will we do?" asked Bessie.

"Why, Bessie Mann! Nobody buy her? What an idea," they cried in a chorus. This was a possibility they refused to contemplate.

As one by one the little garments were finished, they began to feel in their work a great pride, which grew with the admiring commendations lavished upon it by the relatives and friends permitted to view it. One result of the visit to Susie was a beautiful little opera cloak, which Miss Tillie the seamstress found time to make after she came home from work in the evenings, and this was the beginning of numerous contributions to Lenore's outfit, until, Susan said, it made you think of Christmas.

"We have had lots of fun and learned a good deal even if we don't get the thimble," Holliday said philosophically, watching Susan sew on a tiny button. Presently her eyes traveled over to Lily and rested there thoughtfully. "Why, Lily Boone," she exclaimed suddenly, "you have a hole in your dress."

The immaculate Lily, who wore a new ging-

ham, was horrified. "Oh, Holliday! where?" she cried.

"Why, there are two! Look, Susan! I believe somebody cut them with the scissors. Miss Margaret, Lily has some holes in her new dress."

"That's too bad," Miss Margaret said sympathetically, while Lily examined her dress in bewilderment.

Then Susan laughed, and they all remembered what day it was, as Holliday sang out, "April fool! I said I'd catch somebody. Don't be worried, they are only buttonholes, Lily."

Holliday was a most successful April fooler. She knew how to take people unawares. After this they should all have been on their guard, but in the interest of the chapter Miss Margaret read, they forgot, and when Holliday rose and went to the hearth to shake the bastings from her lap, and gave a sudden exclamation, no one doubted its genuineness.

"Miss Margaret, I saw a mouse!" she cried, sitting down on the nearest chair Turk fashion, her feet beneath her. "There it is on the hearth by the fender. See!"

"I see it, and I'm afraid of mice!" Lily sprang up and ran to Miss Margaret, sending her work basket and its contents flying.

Susan and Bessie took refuge on the window sill. There was something small and dark on the hearth, certainly. "Mice can't hurt you," Bessie announced from her place of refuge.

"Let go of me, Lily, and run call Nancy," said Miss Margaret. She did not like mice, but she bravely advanced with the hearth broom, only to beat a retreat when Holliday exclaimed, "There's another!"

When Lily opened the door, Mr. Bright was saying good-by to the Brocade Lady in the hall, and hearing the cause of the excitement, came with masculine courage to the rescue.

"I didn't know we had any mice. I haven't seen one for a year," the Brocade Lady said.

Holliday was laughing and Susan slipped down from the window, as Mr. Bright, stooping, picked up a small object at his feet.

"It is a mouse, isn't it?" Holliday asked.

It was: a tiny velvet mouse with beads for eyes, and another like it lay on the hearth, where Holliday had dropped it.

"We are very stupid to-day. We have let

Holliday fool us twice," Miss Margaret said, looking a little ruffled, but smiling.

"She didn't fool me," said Aline, who had not stirred from her place during the excitement. "I saw her drop it."

"The Brocade Lady made them," Holliday announced merrily. "They belong on Susan's pen-wiper."

Upon invitation, Mr. Bright sat down and was interested to hear about the Circle and its work. Some one proposed to show him the thimble, and with the key the Brocade Lady gave her, Miss Margaret opened the little cabinet that stood in the chimney corner, and took out the case. They all crowded around Mr. Bright, for they had not seen the thimble for several weeks, and then as he touched the spring there arose exclamations of surprise.

"It isn't another April fool, is it?" he asked, looking at Holliday; for the case was empty.

At first they all laughed. It must be some sort of a joke, they felt sure, until the Brocade Lady pointed out that it was scarcely possible, unless Mr. Bright was a prestidigitator. She had locked it up herself and she always carried the key of that cabinet.

"Perhaps it fell out of the case," Holliday suggested.

"How could it when the case was shut tight?" asked Bessie.

However, the cabinet was thoroughly searched, but among the odds and ends of porcelain and silver which the Brocade Lady kept there, no turquoise thimble was found. They looked at each other blankly. Lily still suspected Holliday.

"When was it last seen?" Mr. Bright asked judicially.

Here there was some difference of opinion. Susan thought it was the day they had shown it to Miss Julia Anderson.

"Yes," said Holliday. "Don't you remember she came over to burn something, because they have only natural gas at the Andersons'?"

"That must have been three weeks ago," Miss Margaret thought.

After some discussion it was agreed that this was probably the last time it had been seen.

"I put it in the cabinet myself and locked the door," the Brocade Lady said, "and so far as I can recall I have not opened it since. I

was starting out to an Infirmary Board meeting."

"It is the strangest thing I ever heard of," Bessie exclaimed, naturally concerned for her vanished prize.

"Somebody must have stolen it," said Lily.

"As if any one would!" said Aline.

"You don't suppose Lily meant any of us, Aline?" Holliday cried.

It proved difficult to recall that afternoon accurately. Some one would think of something and the next minute remember it could not have happened on this particular day. It was a hopeless puzzle.

"We are all fooled this time," Susan said.

"The only conclusion I can arrive at," Mr. Bright remarked, after listening to the discussion for some time, "is that the thimble was not in the case when it was put away. At least I advance that as a theory."

"I don't see how that is possible," said the Brocade Lady. "But we are all fallible. Perhaps for the present we had better think no more about it."

"Why mightn't it have been a burglar with a skeleton key, who took it?" asked Lily.

“Why should a burglar take a thimble and leave other things of greater value?” Miss Margaret said.

“Maybe he was a tailor,” Lily added; and this flight of imagination brought down the house.

It was out of the question not to think about the loss. After leaving Aline at the corner where she took her car, the others walked slowly on, still wondering over and guessing at the problem.

“Oh see what a lovely rose somebody has dropped,” Holliday exclaimed, and running forward she stooped to pick up a long-stemmed American Beauty that lay in the middle of the sidewalk. Before her fingers closed upon it, it was quickly drawn away by an unseen force, and a voice called, “April fool!”

“Did you ever!” she cried, very much chagrined, but laughing; and there was Charlie Willard’s merry face looking around the gate post.

“Oh, Charlie, I am so glad you caught her,” cried Bessie, clapping her hands. “She has been fooling us all day.”

“It was only because I was so interested in

the thimble," said Holliday. "It is a shame to drag a lovely rose like that over the pavement."

"I begged it of Miss Julia Anderson," said Charlie. "I saw you coming along, and thought maybe I could catch some of you. Allow me to present you with the innocent cause of your undoing," he added with a grand air, holding out the rose to Holliday, who accepted it and pinned it on her coat.

Lily wished to go to Browinski's for some lemon drops, and Bessie went with her; Charlie's thoughts were bent upon finding another victim, so Holliday and Susan were left to themselves. As they were parting a little farther on, Holliday said, "Susan, I have just remembered that while Miss Julia was there that afternoon a band passed. It was just as she was leaving and we all went to the door with her."

"Then you think some one stole it then, and that the Brocade Lady didn't look in the case when she put it away?" asked Susan.

"I don't know. I only remember how we went to the door with Miss Julia,—the Brocade Lady and all."

When the Brocade Lady was reminded of

this, she insisted it could not have been more than a minute before she went back and locked up the thimble case, and how any one could in that time have removed the thimble and run away, she did not see. "It may turn up," she said. "If it doesn't we must find something else for the prize."

CHAPTER XXII

ALINE'S SECRET

As my friend you must prepare
A sorry secret now to share.

“HE skims along the surface of things; is kind when it does not cost him anything, is clever and entertaining, but incapable of serious application.”

Father was talking to Mother in the next room. Susan, deep in a book, heard the words and wondered for a moment to whom they referred. “Kind when it doesn’t cost anything,” she repeated to herself, then returning to her story she thought no more about them till the next day.

The Seymours had gone away; the big house was closed again for an indefinite time. Since Elsie’s death Mr. Seymour found the place unendurable, Miss Duval told the Brocade Lady. She had been the idol of her father and mother and they could think of nothing but their loss.

Margaret Kennedy had a note from her

aunt,—only a few broken words, thanking her for her sympathy, and with it came a picture of Elsie. It was a dear little picture. The soft eyes, the wistful brightness of the smile, the winning charm, all were there. It was Elsie herself. It stood in its silver frame on Miss Margaret's table at school the day after she received it, and the girls hung over it with absorbed interest. It brought Elsie so near.

Miss Margaret had an engagement to meet the Brocade Lady down town, and hurried away when school was over. At the gate she remembered she had left the picture, and calling to Susan, who was just behind her, she said: "Won't you get Elsie's picture for me, Susan, and leave it with Nancy at the door, as you pass? I am afraid something might happen to it, if it is left in the schoolroom."

Susan ran back willingly. Holliday had gone to take her music lesson, and she passed Bessie and Lily coming out. When she opened the schoolroom door Aline sat at Miss Margaret's table, bending over Elsie's picture. On her face as she looked up was an expression of such unhappiness that Susan's sympathy was stirred. She did not like Aline,

but she could not help being sorry for her. Perhaps after all she cared more about Elsie than she showed.

Aline dropped her head on her arm, still holding the picture in one hand. Susan stood, hesitating and embarrassed. "Isn't she sweet?" she said, and added, "She liked you ever so much, Aline."

"Do you think so really, Susan? Elsie was nice to everybody." Aline's shoulders quivered, and she went on in a queer, strained voice, "It wasn't fair to let her die."

"Oh, I guess it was, Aline," Susan replied, sitting down on the other side of the table,—"fair to her. Dr. Thomas says she never could have been well."

Aline suddenly lifted her head. Susan thought she was going to argue the matter, but what she said was something quite different, and unexpected. "Susan, will you help me about something?"

"Why, if I can,—yes, Aline."

"And you'll promise not to tell?"

Susan hesitated, and Aline added, "You can't help me unless you do."

Susan did not want to promise, but Father's

words came to her mind, "Kind when it doesn't cost anything." Aline was unhappy. She ought to help her if she could. "I won't tell if you don't want me to," she said.

Aline was silent for a moment, then she exclaimed despondently, "I don't know why I do things, sometimes."

Susan nodded understandingly. "I know."

"But you never do anything really wrong or hateful."

"Oh, yes, lots of things. I am a coward sometimes," Susan owned with a generous desire to reassure Aline at her own expense.

"Not so very long ago I was rude to—a person I like because—because I can't bear to be teased." Remembering the part Aline had had in the incident, Susan hesitated and came to a full stop.

"Do you mean at the skating rink? Honestly, Susan, I didn't dream you believed we were going to telephone to Dick that day."

"It was Bessie who started it, but I was dreadfully mad at both of you. I know I was silly, and it is too late now." Susan spoke sadly.

"Well, anyway, you never in your life did anything so bad as this. I thought I wouldn't

tell,—ever, but somehow I've got to." Aline looked down at the picture she held, and Susan felt, though she had not said so, that Elsie had something to do with it.

"I like you better than any of the rest, so I am going to tell you. It is about the thimble," Aline went on.

Susan gazed at her with astonished eyes.

"You needn't think I stole it," Aline cried indignantly, though Susan had not spoken.

"Why, Aline Arthur, I wouldn't think such a dreadful thing, but if you know anything about it, you ought to tell."

"I know where it is."

"Can't you get it?" asked Susan, bewildered.

"Not by myself; that is why I want you to help me. It was the day Miss Julia Anderson was there, and you all went out to look at something. I don't like her; she's silly," Aline paused to add. "I didn't go at first. The thimble was on the table in the case, but it was open, and accidentally I knocked it off and it fell into the Brocade Lady's big stuffed chair. I don't think I meant to do it, Susan, but I felt cross, and I

didn't want Bessie to have it because she is so conceited. I don't know what possessed me, but I gave it a poke with the paper cutter, and it went down between the seat and the back.

"I tried to get it out, but I couldn't, and then I thought I'd wait and try some other time, and anyway I didn't care much if it was lost. I followed the rest of you to the door, and I hadn't decided not to tell, but when we came back and I found the Brocade Lady had put away the empty case without opening it, why, I was glad for a minute to think Bessie wouldn't get it, and then I didn't like to tell, and—oh, I don't know, Susan,—it just went on and on. I kept thinking I'd have a chance to get it out, but I haven't."

"If you had only told then, it would be so much easier," began Susan.

"Don't say stupid things like that," Aline cried. "Perhaps it would have been, but if you will help me I can get it out now, I think. Then I can say I found it, poking around in the chair, don't you see?"

Susan saw, but it didn't seem quite fair to her. "Aline," she said, "I found out last

winter that the only comfortable way is to be honest about things, and not keep them secret."

Aline squared her shoulders. "Susan, I have made up my mind. I am going to try to get that thimble. It was an accident in the first place, and I am not going to tell now and have them saying things. I may tell after we get it. I don't know. I think I can get it out with a piece of bent wire, but I can't get a chance by myself. Now, if both of us should go early next Friday, nobody would think anything of it,—the Brocade Lady goes to the infirmary, and you can watch while I fish it out. Will you, Susan? You promised, you know."

Yes, she had, Susan owned, and while she didn't quite like it, perhaps there wasn't any harm in waiting till she found the thimble before she told. Aline had not meant to lose it. It was only a bit of bad temper. If she had told at once, no harm would have been done, just as, if she had told Holliday at once about Grandmother and Aunt Emily last winter, she would have saved herself much unhappiness. "I think it would be better to tell

now, Aline, but I did promise and I will help you if I can," she said.

"That is good of you, Susan," Aline said gratefully.

Susan was coming out of the Brocade Lady's gate, after leaving Elsie's picture, when Holliday passed the corner returning from her lesson. "Why, Susan Maxwell, what have you been doing all this time?" she called, turning and coming toward her.

Susan had considered her explanation to Mother for being later than usual, but she had not thought of meeting Holliday, so she stammered a little over her reply. "Miss Margaret asked me to get Elsie's picture, and I stopped to talk to Aline a minute."

Holliday looked at her narrowly. "I should call it a pretty long minute," she said. "And what makes your face so red? What were you talking about?"

Susan swung her school bag nervously. "We talked a little about Elsie. Do you know, Holliday, I think Aline cares a great deal about her?"

"And what else?" Holliday demanded.

"Why, I don't know. Holliday, what

makes you look at me in such a funny way?" Susan asked miserably.

"Because you are having a secret with Aline, and it isn't fair."

"But, Holliday, I'm not. That is, it isn't my secret —"

"We promised to tell each other everything, and I have kept my promise."

"You didn't tell me about the cake," faltered Susan.

"That was very different," Holliday replied loftily.

"How do you know it was?" cried Susan. "You don't know anything about this. I don't want to have a secret from you, and I'll tell you just as soon as I can."

For the time Susan's earnestness and evident distress won the day, but Holliday continued to be a little suspicious, and on Friday morning when Aline whispered as she passed, "Come early, at a quarter of three," Susan was conscious of her eyes, and felt as guilty as if she had a crime on her conscience. She was far from being a conspirator by nature.

Holliday was never very prompt at the Circle meeting, and Susan was not in the habit of

waiting for her; so there was no difficulty there, and it seemed rather simple, after all, to do as Aline wished. As Susan went in, the Brocade Lady was setting out for one of her board meetings, and Miss Margaret had not come down. Aline appeared a moment later, and moving the chair around to the light, went to work with her bent wire, while Susan watched at the window.

"It was just in this corner it went down, Susan," she explained. "I can't feel it with my hand, but I ought to be able to reach it with the wire."

The wire, however, in spite of Aline's confidence, failed to bring out the thimble. After several attempts she became very angry, and a strange dark flush spread over her face.

Forgetting her watch for a moment, Susan left the window. "If you can't get it, Aline, you will tell, won't you?" she asked.

"I'll do just as I please," Aline replied angrily, and at that moment the door opened to admit Holliday. Behind her came Miss Margaret.

"How nice and prompt you all are to-day," the latter remarked.

“Aline and Susan seem to be having a private meeting,” Holliday said airily.

Susan turned beseeching eyes to Aline. Wasn't she going to tell? Aline, still flushed and cross, twisted up her wire and put it in her work bag. Clearly she had no intention of telling now.

Susan sat helpless and miserable over her work that afternoon. Holliday was her usual merry self, but all her talk was addressed to Miss Margaret, or to Bessie and Lily. The other two were ignored.

“There's an awfully nice girl come to live on our square,” she announced,—“Clarice Dumont. Isn't that a lovely name? I like pretty names.”

Susan listened, feeling painfully conscious of her own plain, everyday name. She had seen Clarice. Holliday had pointed her out, but not as if she was particularly interested in her. She was a year or two older than they, a pale blonde, with very grown-up manners.

It is a question if Holliday knew how cruel she was during the days that followed. She knew her power and liked to use it. To be petted and spoiled by everybody is apt to make one careless of the feelings of others; and be-

sides, Holliday told herself that Susan deserved to be punished.

They sat side by side at school as always, and Holliday was polite,—extremely so, and as sociable as an icicle. She was as gay as ever; if possible she sparkled more than usual, but it was for others. She continued to talk about Clarice. She had asked her to dinner.

After one or two attempts to continue the old plan of walking home together, Susan gave it up and slipped down Vine Street by herself. As Joe said, apropos of something else, Her Shyness had not yet learned to stand up for herself. It was not her way to make a confidant of any one, but she cried herself to sleep more than once. Mother began to talk about a tonic.

As for Aline, she was threatened with typhoid fever, and could not be appealed to. Susan felt the burden of her secret in more ways than one. It seemed almost as bad as stealing not to tell when you knew; yet she had promised Aline. Being kind had certainly cost a great deal in this instance.

“Say, Susanna,” said Joe one evening about this time, “do you happen to have spent that ten Aunt Henrietta sent you?”

“No, I am saving it to buy a set of books,—perhaps some little Shakespeares like Miss Margaret’s, but I haven’t decided quite. Why?”

“Oh, nothing much. Say, how about lending it while you are making up your mind? I’ll pay you interest.”

“Why, yes, of course, Joe. I was thinking of giving it to Father to put in the bank, but it will do just as well to let you have it,” and Susan ran up to find the gold piece for her brother. In the process she unearthed the motto Dick Seymour had given her, and the gauze fan from the Christmas tree. How long ago last Christmas seemed! And what difference did it make if she had beautiful eyes?

“Thank you, Susan Hermione. I’ll reimburse you shortly. Sure you can spare it? And oh, by the way, keep it dark, will you?”

She nodded. “How is the story coming on, Joe?” she ventured to ask.

“Well, it is not, so to say, coming at all at present. Genius does not burn,” was her brother’s reply, and then he went whistling gayly down the walk.

CHAPTER XXIII

AT THE BAZAAR

Pray you come to our bazaar;
Wares of all descriptions are
Here displayed.

“By the way, Brand, what has become of your ghost? I have heard nothing of it for a long while. Have you laid it?” It was Mr. Heywood who spoke, taking a seat beside Colonel Brand in the street-car.

On the colonel's other side was a portly lady, and next to her was Susan. Mr. Heywood's voice was hearty. He could be heard all over the car. Susan was interested. The colonel looked annoyed.

“I trust the nonsense is dying out,” he said.

“I notice you keep those particular shutters closed pretty tight,” Mr. Heywood went on, laughing. “Do you know, a spectral Christmas tree strikes me as something new in ghost lore. My little girl, now, is as sure as she is of her own identity, that she saw that tree on Christmas Eve.”

The colonel looked bored. He owned politely that it was very odd. "But then," he added, "your daughter had no doubt heard the gossip, and some persons are strangely open to suggestion."

"Oh, of course, I don't pretend to insist that she really saw it. She thinks she did, and —" Just here the portly lady got out, and Susan was brought to view. Mr. Heywood interrupted himself to exclaim, "Why, Miss Susan, I didn't know you were there," and changing his seat for the one beside her, he shook hands cordially. "You know Colonel Brand, don't you?—Miss Susan Maxwell."

Susan wished he wouldn't, and the colonel bowed stiffly.

"I was just asking Colonel Brand about his Christmas tree," Mr. Heywood went on cheerfully, unconscious that the subject was not agreeable to either of his hearers. "Weren't you there with Holliday the night that she saw it?"

Susan said "Yes" timidly, while the colonel looked at her sternly beneath his heavy eyebrows. She was glad that her corner was in sight and she must get off.

“Holliday will be at home to-morrow,” Mr. Heywood told her as she said good-by.

Holliday had been away somewhere with Aunt Nan for the Easter vacation, and actually it had been a relief to have her out of sight. Susan had turned to her books and Wynkyns for comfort, and in a measure found it. Almost in the twinkling of an eye the world had burst into blossom and leaf. No matter what troubles you carried around in your heart, it was spring outside,—real summery spring, and you could not be quite miserable.

The odor of fresh paint and furniture polish mingled with the breath of apple blossoms and lilacs. Snowball bushes bent beneath the weight of their blooms, and the calycanthus surrendered its fragrant buds by the handful without missing them. In all the windows fresh curtains were up for Easter,—and after Easter came the bazaar.

In the hammock on the side porch Susan had some happy hours in spite of things, and when she thought of Holliday, hope would spring up. Aline was getting better, and the secret must come out before long, and then Holliday would understand and be sorry.

But there was Clarice. Suppose Holliday really liked her best? Susan twisted the ring Holliday had given her. Perhaps she ought to offer to give it back. Still, Holliday had her locket.

“Is anything wrong between you and Holliday?” Miss Margaret asked one day, finding Susan on the porch.

The question was unexpected, and Susan’s eyes filled. “She thinks I am having a secret from her, and I can’t help it, for it isn’t my secret,” she answered.

Miss Margaret was very kind and consoling. It would all blow over, she was sure, and if Susan was certain she was in the right she must be patient and try not to worry. As she talked she was looking back in thought and putting two and two together.

“If a person doesn’t do a thing you think they ought to do, Miss Margaret,—a thing it seems wrong not to do, you can’t help it. You just have to wait, but you feel as if you had done wrong yourself.” Susan looked very wistful as she tried to state her case as guardedly as possible.

Miss Margaret patted the hand she held.

“It is difficult to advise when you don’t know the problem, but I suppose if it is not wronging any one else, you are right to wait.”

The bazaar opened in the afternoon of Easter Monday and lasted two days. No corner of the big hall, so gayly decorated with cheesecloth and spring flowers, was more attractive than that presided over by the members of the Circle of the Golden Thimble, where on a table covered with an interesting assortment of fancy things Lenore sat enthroned in the midst. Surely any one might be proud to possess her.

“She is so lovely I hope she won’t be bought the very first thing,” Holliday exclaimed. “It would spoil the table.”

In the enjoyment of this long looked forward to occasion, Holliday at times forgot to be distant to Susan. She had brought Clarice Dumont with her, however, asking Miss Margaret if she might not help in Aline’s place. With Clarice standing before her she could not very well refuse, but she was not exactly cordial, Susan thought.

Bessie whispered, “Did you ever see such airs?”

Susan thought Clarice had rather silly, simpering ways. She seemed very fond of Holliday, and addressed her frequently as "Darling."

Anticipations of an immediate sale for the doll were so confident, Miss Margaret felt obliged to remind her owners that she might not be bought at all. "You know spring is not the best time for dolls. We may have to wait till Christmas," she said.

It was unbelievable, but little by little, doilies, handkerchiefs, book-marks, magazine covers were sold, until their stock was perceptibly thinned out, and still Lenore sat undisturbed in the midst.

Of any lack of appreciative, outspoken admiration she had no cause to complain. Little girls paused to exclaim over her wistfully. Mothers, grandmothers and aunts examined her apparel and wondered over the skill and patience of the needlewomen. Mrs. Boone brought person after person to see how beautifully Lily could hem, but though everybody knew Mrs. Boone had plenty of money, she did not purchase Lenore.

Miss Arthur, too, expressed her admiration,

but was satisfied with one or two trifles when it came to buying. Aline was getting better but was still weak. "She has proved a very patient invalid, I must own," she told Miss Margaret. "I begin to think this winter has helped her after all. Perhaps I haven't been as considerate always as I should have been. I wish you would come out as soon as this fair is over. Aline has said several times she wanted to see you."

The bazaar was seen in its glory at night, when pretty girls in gay costumes flitted about with their wares, invited the hungry to supper, or urged the wonderful power of the celebrated fortune-teller, who had been engaged for the evening, and received all, who were willing to pay her very moderate fee, in an oriental booth near the entrance. At intervals a band discoursed lively music.

People came thronging in, among them Joe and Mr. Bright, and actually Colonel Brand, who, it must be confessed, seemed rather out of place, until the Brocade Lady took him under her protection.

Miss Margaret looked particularly lovely in white, and no doubt had something to do

with the popularity of this corner of the hall. Mr. Bright kept coming back. Once it was to bring Miss Margaret some roses from the flower booth. Joe Maxwell, who was making himself both useful and entertaining, regarded him with disapproval.

Somebody was always coming for Mr. Joe to help about this or that. Once it was to fix the lamp of the seeress, for only by means of its dim red glow could she read the palms of her patrons.

"She is a daisy of a fortune-teller," he said to Miss Margaret, laughing, when he returned. "You must see her. Come have your palm read; I have the tickets."

She shook her head very decidedly. She hadn't time and she thought it was silly.

"Susan Hermione, here, you and Lily go and have your fortunes told," Joe said, holding out the tickets.

"I don't believe I want to, Joe," Susan began.

"Yes, you do; go on. I have bought the tickets and you must use them; Lily will go, won't you, Lily?"

So hand in hand with Lily, Susan presently

stood before the mysterious portal. The Poet was pensively receiving tickets. He said only one might go in at a time, and Lily insisted that Susan must be first, so she timidly entered the dimly lighted chamber.

On a divan, across which a tiger skin was thrown, reclined an awe-inspiring figure, draped in rich oriental fabrics, with gleaming chains and bracelets and other tinkling ornaments, and a spangled scarf about her head so adjusted as to conceal her features.

She took Susan's hands in hers, holding them palms upward beneath the glow of the red lamp. Her touch was cool and pleasant. Then she let the left hand go, and keeping the right one, studied it with a magnifying glass.

"You are very fond of books," she said. "You are studious and have a bright mind. It seems quite possible that some day you will be a writer, perhaps a poet. You don't like mathematics, but are capable of mastering it if you try. You are sensitive. You lack confidence in yourself. You are a little cold and indifferent towards people in general, but very fond of a few." The fortune-teller

paused here, took up Susan's left hand again, glanced at it, then for a moment turned to a huge volume with strange cabalistic signs on its cover, which lay on a small table beside her.

Taking her right hand once more she continued: "I see that just now you are worried about something. I do not know what it is, but it has come between you and one you love, and through no fault of your own. I can also see that you need not despair, for it is destined to be made right before long, and you will be happier than ever. There is wealth in your palm. It will probably come to you through marriage. I see an illness, or it may be an accident, but on the whole the lines in your hand indicate a happy life."

When the palmist released her hand, Susan rose. "Thank you," she said, for it seemed very wonderful and she couldn't help believing every word of it.

"Don't thank me; thank your stars," replied the fortune-teller.

"You needn't be afraid, Lily, it's lovely fun," Susan cried with shining eyes to her waiting companion.

"Then I infer your fortune is to be a happy one," the Poet said.

"Oh, yes," Susan answered with a shy smile. She had a sort of friendly feeling for the Poet.

"You are favored, then, for it is not so with all who seek their fate at her hands," he added, and sighed very deeply.

"Have you tried yours?" Susan asked.

The Poet answered "Yes." Such an unadorned, lonesome "yes," that Susan felt embarrassed, and said no more.

Lily came out presently, very complacent over her fortune, and they returned to the table comparing notes. Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell were there, and Mother wished to know where Susan had been, and when she heard, she shook her head.

"Pshaw! Kitty, it is just nonsense," Father said, laughing.

"I don't like such things even in play," Mother objected.

"I thought for a minute that her voice was familiar, but the circular says she is a real gypsy. And she told me the strangest thing!" Susan's eyes were dreamy.

“ You see! ” said Mother.

Holliday and Clarice went to have their palms read now, and as trade became brisk, Susan had to give her attention to business. The Brocade Lady brought Colonel Brand to look at the doll, which he pretended to admire. He purchased a number of small articles and then looked helpless over the package. Miss Margaret took pity on him, offering to keep it for him till he was ready to leave.

Joe recommended the fortune-teller to him, but he seemed to prefer the vicinity of the cash box. Miss Margaret was the cashier. Susan thought Colonel Brand was rather old to have his fortune told, anyway.

Bringing a bill to Miss Margaret for change, she heard her saying, “ I think it is a beautiful name, and if it were my house I’d plant two real Christmas trees, one on each side of the gate, to give a new reason for it.”

“ That is a most interesting idea, and worth considering,” the colonel responded. “ Fighting fire with fire, as it were.”

When Holliday came back, Joe wished to know how she liked it.

“ Oh, I don’t know,—very well, I guess, Mr.

Joe," she answered, looking rather serious.

"I think she is a perfect dear, Mr. Maxwell," cried Clarice. "She says I am going to marry when I'm eighteen. In three years more, think!" She put her arms around Holliday, and looked archly at Joe.

Holliday twisted herself away, and walked to the other side of the table.

Miss Margaret gave holiday until Wednesday, for it was useless to try to have school while the bazaar was going on.

On the second day it chanced that Bessie was left in charge while the others were at lunch. When they returned she was all excitement. Lenore was sold! She pointed to the vacant place on the table and displayed three crisp bills, two fives and a two.

"But who bought her, Bessie?" they cried in chorus.

"I don't know. It was a man,—just an ordinary man. He walked around the table and asked me if the doll was for sale. I said yes, and she was twelve dollars. He said it was *right smart* to ask for a doll." Bessie laughed as she repeated his words. "And then he took out the money and said, 'Do her up.'"

“I was so surprised I didn’t know what to do, but I told him she was really very cheap. Mrs. Willard helped me tie Lenore up, and she made an awfully big bundle with her clothes. Then he carried her away.”

“You are sure it isn’t counterfeit money, Bessie?” Susan asked.

This dreadful suggestion proved to have no foundation in fact. The bills were genuine and new; but the world seemed suddenly flat. Sad as it would have been not to sell her, to have her disappear without leaving a clew behind her as to her fate was scarcely short of tragedy.

So she became the lost Lenore. It was the logical outcome of such a name, Joe said.

Fortune-tellers were, of course, only pretend, as Mother said, yet Susan wondered how she could know about her trouble. Was it really written on her palm? She gazed at her plump hand thoughtfully. “It will be made right, and you will be happier than ever.” She hugged this assurance to her heart. She couldn’t help believing it, she so much wanted to.

And then, wonder of wonders! the next

morning Holliday was waiting for her on the corner.

“Susan,” she said, “I have decided to make up, if you will. I don’t think it was fair, after you promised, to go and have a secret with Aline, but—”

“Oh, Holliday, I wish I could tell you. I think perhaps I can before long. I didn’t want to have a secret with her. I am so glad.” Susan fairly trembled with joy.

After this they walked on, hand in hand, in the pleasant shade of the maples, almost in full leaf now.

“I am just an everyday sort of a girl, Holliday,” Susan said. “I am afraid I’m not interesting like Clarice.”

“Clarice is the most tiresome person in the world!” Holliday asserted warmly. “She’s stupid and silly. You are a thousand times nicer.”

Later on that day Susan asked Holliday if she believed in fortune-tellers.

“Why? Did she tell you something queer?”

Susan repeated what the palmist had said about her trouble.

“ Well, Susan, she told me a lot of things about marrying and all that, and then she said I had had a quarrel with my best friend, and that it was my fault and I ought to make up. It seemed very strange that she should know; and then anyway I was tired being mad.”

That night Susan wrote in her diary: “ One good of trials is that you feel so happy when they are over.”

Mother recommended to Mrs. Boone the tonic Dr. Thomas had given Susan. It had brought her out wonderfully, she said.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE COLONEL

'T is out of reason. He denies
The testimony of his eyes.

THE thimble was found. Aline had confessed to Miss Margaret, and the Brocade Lady sent at once for an upholsterer, who got it out in no time.

"Aline is very sorry about it," Miss Margaret said. "She did not realize how wrong it was not to tell at first. You know she is very persistent, and she had set her heart upon getting it out of the chair herself. She is too weak to be scolded now, and I think she really sees what a mistake she made. She asked me to explain it to you."

"So that was it!" Holliday cried, looking at Susan, who nodded.

"I couldn't help her telling me," she said, "and then, of course, I couldn't go and tell any one else, when she asked me not."

"No, I suppose you couldn't," Holliday

owned contritely. "I am afraid I persecuted you for righteousness' sake, Susan."

Miss Margaret, as they walked together in the park one Saturday afternoon, pointed the moral. She said that to promise never to have a secret from your best friend, was wrong, for it might sometime keep you from helping some one else. Friends must trust each other.

Dr. Thomas was a good doctor. He knew as well as anybody that there was more than one sort of tonic. When the low fever which had hung over Aline for several weeks was finally broken, and she began to convalesce, he took his pad and wrote two prescriptions, one in the orthodox hieroglyphics, the other in plain English. The last read: "Something to pet. A dog, or cat, or pony, or all three."

"This may strike you as expensive," he remarked to Miss Arthur, "but it will pay in the end."

Miss Arthur did not like pets, but during her niece's illness she had made a few discoveries which caused her to accept the suggestion more patiently than the doctor expected.

On the third floor there was a small unused room which Aline had asked for, "to keep her

trash in," was the way her aunt expressed it. Miss Arthur had never entered it until something took her there while Aline was ill, and then the sight of the "trash" touched her.

The unpapered walls were decorated with pressed ferns and leaves, and she had hung up her father's picture and a little sketch of Elsie's, very crude, but showing a remarkable likeness for an unpracticed hand. From the garret she had appropriated an old desk and a chair or two, had curtained the window with something she found among discarded odds and ends, and the whole effect was somehow homelike and individual,—more so than any other corner of Miss Arthur's handsome house.

This little room helped her to see that there was something in this tempestuous, difficult child worth working with. The Brocade Lady said Aline was so bubbling over with individuality that she had to express it, if only in contrariness; and Miss Arthur, who was not a very acute person, began to realize something of this, and to feel that she had not been quite as thoughtful as she should have been for her niece.

All this and more she told Margaret Ken-

nedy, and it goes to explain how, when Miss Margaret, Susan and Holliday, with Joe as escort, stopped at Miss Arthur's one afternoon, they happened to find Aline on the porch in a big wicker chair with a half-grown Maltese kitten in her lap.

Aline showed her illness, but looked bright, and was glad to see them and hear about the bazaar and Lenore.

The original object of this Saturday afternoon expedition had not been a call at Miss Arthur's, but the finding of a suitable place for the May picnic.

There was, not far from Reservoir Park, a bit of woodland, with a stream running through it, known as Bennett's Woods. It was accessible, and yet secluded enough to be ideal for small picnics. When the question came up, everybody who knew about it agreed it was the place of all others, and this committee of four had gone out to view the land and lay their plans.

Alas for their hopes! A brand new wire fence surrounded their proposed picnic ground, and a large board with "No Trespassing" on it confronted them.

They looked at one another disconsolately. "I suppose this settles it," Miss Margaret said.

"Isn't there a gate?" asked Holliday.

"But they don't want us," said Susan, pointing to the sign.

"It is queer, after being open and free so many years," added Joe. "Perhaps it has changed hands."

Then Miss Margaret suggested that possibly Miss Arthur might know, and anyway they were near there and could stop and rest a while.

Miss Arthur could not remember at first. She was sure that woodland had been sold, to whom she didn't know. "I wonder if it was not Colonel Brand?" she said, after thinking over it.

"Of course," remarked Joe, "he is buying up the earth."

"Oh, dear, I do not wish to ask any more favors of him," sighed Miss Margaret.

"Have you been asking so many?" Miss Arthur inquired.

"Only one," Margaret explained, and told about the Selfs.

“Watkins, the real estate man, was telling me about the colonel’s arrangement with the Selfs,” said Joe. “It seems they are to have the shop and the rooms back of it, rent free for the rest of their lives. He takes over the property, keeps it in repair, pays taxes and so on, receives the rent from the upper floor, and in the end the property is his. It strikes me as rather a good thing for the colonel. The ground is likely to increase in value considerably in the next few years.”

“It is a good deal better for the Selfs than having the mortgage foreclosed,” Miss Arthur replied. “They may live for a good while.”

“I think we must try to find another place,” Margaret repeated.

“The colonel is nicer than he used to be,” Holliday said. “I thought he was hateful that day when he told us not to talk about his house being haunted. Suppose I get papa to ask him, Miss Margaret?”

Tea or something happened just then to keep Miss Margaret from replying, and nothing more was said on the subject. An hour later whom should they find in the bird cage

station but Colonel Brand himself, waiting for the car.

“Do you know you have fenced in our picnic grounds, Colonel Brand?” Holliday demanded saucily.

Miss Margaret shook her head, but it was too late. The colonel insisted upon understanding. He said he was sure there was a gate, and “No Trespassing” did not refer to friends, who were welcome to have as many picnics there as they liked.

Really, he was so pleasant about it, and it was so much the most convenient place, that Miss Margaret’s objections were overruled and the question settled in favor of Bennett’s Woods.

That night the colonel saw his Christmas tree. He did not tell any one about it till long afterwards, for the reason that he did not believe his own eyes.

The Brocade Lady was right when she said Sidney Brand was diffident. He had faced many difficulties and conquered them, but he had never conquered a certain self-consciousness, with which went a troublesome sensitiveness. What would Joe Maxwell have thought

if he had known that the bank president envied him his youth and his easy grace of manner?

The colonel was a lonely man, for being naturally self-contained, and not knowing how to meet people except on the plane of business, he was considered cold. Yet he had social aspirations and felt wonderfully cheered and uplifted when on rare occasions he found himself mingling with others in an easy, friendly fashion.

It pleased him to be able to furnish the place for the picnic, and he was not indifferent to Miss Kennedy's charming smile. Indeed, he was recalling it as he walked home from his club about midnight.

He was having the house painted and repaired, and he was thinking of her clever suggestion for making the name which clung to the place reasonable on other grounds than ghostly ones. The cedars were already ordered and other plans on foot for beautifying the garden. Next year he would— In the midst of his planning the colonel came face to face with his Christmas tree!

The workmen had left some of the shutters off, among them those of the east parlor, and

there in the window it shone, seeming to brighten with its lights the dimness of that unused room. It was a sight suggesting fairy fingers rather than ghostly ones.

Colonel Brand closed his eyes, and then looked again. Yes, it was there. He walked on impatiently, telling himself it was nonsense. He crossed the street, and again looked up at the window; but here, so close beneath it, it was half hidden by the porch.

Had he really seen a tree, or was he dreaming? As he stood before his gate the electric light which hung almost opposite grew dim, and after sizzling despondently for a second, went out.

The lights in the town were abominable; but ought he not to get a better view of that ridiculous tree with no light in the street? The colonel recrossed and again looked up at his east window. There was nothing there but shutterless, curtainless panes with darkness behind them.

“I must have been bewitched for the moment,” said the colonel.

CHAPTER XXV

MAY-DAY

“We in thought will join your throng,
Ye that pipe, and ye that play,
Ye that through your hearts to-day
Feel the gladness of the May.”

—*Wordsworth.*

EVERY one knows how perfect a May-day can be, and this particular one might have been made to order as a model for all others, so pure and soft was the air, so deep and clear the sky, so delicious the freshness of grass and trees, the fragrance and color of early blooms. It was inexpressibly good to be alive, and what more appropriate expression of this joy than a May party with a queen and her court?

The bells on the little brown mules actually jingled a tune as if the gladness of the occasion had somehow been communicated to them and they knew they were pulling a chartered car with a royal party on board, instead of just anybody who chose to lift a hand.

It was sad to think that some people had to go to school or to business on this heavenly

day, and worse yet that others who might have been going to the country, did not care to.

At the Reservoir, where the car line ended, Uncle Dan, Mammy Ria's husband, met them with a farm wagon which carried them and their baskets and bundles the rest of the way. And now, being far from town, their laughter, which had enlivened the way, turned to song. The horse-chestnuts were in bloom, as well as the dogwood and other spring blossoms that make glad the first of May in this part of the world. Singing was a necessity.

Dan had made an earlier trip to the picnic grounds, and put up two swings and a see-saw, so there was amusement for the little ones, while Miss Margaret and the older girls made preparations for their guests who were expected in the afternoon.

Since the bazaar the Circle had been making, under Miss Margaret's direction, some simple costumes for their May-day. Out of cheese-cloth and cambric, with a few well-directed stitches, wonders had been accomplished. Much against her will, Miss Margaret had to consent to be queen. Holliday, whose fingers could do anything with flowers, wove her a beautiful

crown of daffodils, and from the shoulders of her white dress fell a mantle of pale green. Her maids of honor, who wore chaplets of ivy and mantles of red, blue, yellow and violet, agreed that there were no adjectives to express adequately how lovely she looked.

When Miss Margaret undertook a thing she did it thoroughly, and having consented to be queen she played her part royally.

The younger children were dressed as pages and fairies, and Gertie was charged with the task of keeping them presentable till the guests arrived.

"Isn't dressing up the loveliest fun!" Holiday cried, dancing across the rustic bridge which spanned the little stream, her hands full of flowers.

"It seems so especially nice to be dressed up out of doors," added Susan. "It makes such a beautiful play."

The morning flew on wings and it was dinner time before any one remembered to be hungry; but being reminded, they developed tremendous appetites. Lily's anxious grandmother would have been astonished beyond measure at the number of sandwiches she con-

sumed; Mrs. Maxwell might well have hesitated to call Susan's appetite delicate, and Aunt Nan would have been inexpressibly shocked at her niece's boast that she had eaten ten biscuit. But this was the magic of out-of-doors.

When the royal feast was done, Robin and his clan must feed the fish in the brook, and the maids of honor had all they could do to keep the fairies and pages out of the water while Gertie had her dinner and put away the baskets.

With the first installment of guests came a big freezer of ice cream, Mrs. Boone's donation to the picnic. She herself drove out, bringing Mrs. Maxwell and Mrs. Mann with her. There were some more mothers and older sisters; Bessie's brother Tom, and Charley Willard, and Joe Maxwell, who, being in a bank, could get off sometimes for an afternoon, and Miss Arthur brought Aline over for a little while, in the phaeton. She was not strong enough for an all-day picnic. Last of all came the Brocade Lady, just as everybody was wondering why she had not come on the car, in Colonel Brand's trap.

Miss Margaret had not expected to face such an audience in the character of May Queen, and she was decidedly provoked with the Brocade Lady for bringing the colonel. It gave her a lovely color. "Why in the world should he want to come?" she said to Joe.

"He is a queer chap," answered Joe, who wasn't altogether comfortable under the eye of the bank president. The colonel's business methods and his own differed.

The Brocade Lady was not to be blamed for preferring to drive out in Colonel Brand's comfortable carriage, but she might have known he would not fit in at a May party.

Miss Margaret made the best of it, and with her maids around her was a charming picture. There were recitations and songs, these last with Joe's banjo to keep the key, after which the Brocade Lady awarded the turquoise thimble to the most proficient seamstress, who, as everybody knew, was Bessie. Then came a surprise, for as Bessie received it and returned to her seat, the Brocade Lady went on to say that a generous friend had been so impressed with the quality of the work done on the doll's wardrobe that she asked the privilege of expressing

it in a practical way, and when hand in hand the three other maids stood before her, each received a tiny box with a gold thimble in it. Not so unique as Bessie's, they were pretty enough for any seamstress.

Their benefactress turned out to be Miss Arthur, who wished to remain anonymous but Miss Margaret would not let her. Aline was as much surprised as any one.

"They are perfectly lovely, Miss Arthur," Holliday said. "We thank you ever so much and we will try to sew up to them."

After this everybody did as he pleased. The ladies sat and talked and looked on; the children swung and see-sawed, and there were all sorts of games with Joe as leader, in which the queen joined with her subjects. Joe Maxwell was famous for games. On an occasion like this Colonel Brand faded into insignificance beside him. The colonel looked on for a while and then wandered off, to view his land, no doubt.

The crowning glory of the afternoon, as some thought it, was announced by Robin Bright, whose quick eyes were first to see the arrival. "A monkey grinder! A monkey

grinder!" he cried, clapping his hands joyfully.

An organ grinder and a monkey at your beck and call for a whole afternoon! Whose brilliant idea was this? Miss Margaret looked from Mrs. Boone to Miss Arthur, but they disclaimed it. Could it have been Joe Maxwell? It was exactly like his extravagance. But no, he regretfully denied it.

In this way the colonel, who came strolling back, was finally run down. He played with his eye-glasses and was somewhat vague, but didn't deny it. Miss Margaret felt ashamed to think how cross she had been over his coming, and tried to make up for it, which, as the colonel didn't know she had been cross, he did not altogether understand, but enjoyed. That much was plain.

A monkey relieved from business responsibilities for a whole afternoon was a novelty indeed, and so was an organ grinder willing to repeat his tunes indefinitely. It made no difference whether the tune was sad or gay, the children danced to it, and so the afternoon waned, and it was time for ice cream, and then they must pack up and get ready for Dan and



“‘A MONKEY GRINDER! A MONKEY GRINDER!’”

the wagon. Beautiful days will come to an end.

Some in the wagon and some on foot, they all arrived at the little station where the chartered car waited for them. It moved off to the strains of "Ah, I have sighed to rest me,—” and the monkey waved his red cap in parting salute.

"Hasn't it been fun!" exclaimed Holliday, waving her hand to the Brocade Lady, who drove by with Colonel Brand.

"Jolliest picnic I ever went to," said Charlie Willard, nursing his ear, which had been stung by a wasp,—the only casualty of the day.

"I wish we could have a Maypole next year," said Bessie.

"Oh, say," interrupted her brother, "I have found out who the fortune-teller was at the bazaar."

"Wasn't she a real gypsy?" asked Susan.

"Gypsy? no,—it was Miss Julia. They got up that story about her going to Cincinnati and fooled lots of people," answered Tom.

"Then won't my fortune come true after all?" Lily wanted to know, in injured tones.

“Just as much as if it had been somebody else, goosie,” said Charlie.

Susan and Holliday looked at each other. How had Miss Julia known so much?

“Let me tell you the latest on Lily—” began Charlie.

The Angel protested, but the rest begged for it, and Tom Mann, who admired Lily, said, “Never mind, I’ll tell one on him when he gets through.”

“Well,” continued Charlie, “the other day Uncle Allan said something about having breakfast à la carte on the train, and my cousin Lily told him she thought he was very lazy. He couldn’t see why till after questioning her it came out that she thought it was breakfast à la *cot*, and meant in bed.”

“I don’t care,” cried Lily, as they all laughed. “It sounded exactly like ‘cot.’”

“Did you ever hear about the *orange outing*?” asked Tom. “How did it go, Charlie? ‘The orange outing is an ape found in Sumatra and Borneo—’”

“Oh, well, but I was young then,” protested Charlie, joining in the laugh.

“Orang-outang,” said Holliday. “Why,

I think that is better than anything of Lily's."

"And I am sure Susan said—" Lily began.

"Now don't tell about the Gridironists any more," Susan begged, "that is an old story."

That night Colonel Brand sat in his handsome library alone, thinking. One would imagine he might have felt happy under the circumstances, but he didn't. He was lonely and dissatisfied with himself. What a big, handsome fellow Joe Maxwell was! What spirits he had, what a grand playfellow he made! He deserved the smiles the May Queen gave him.

Thinking of smiles, the colonel turned the leaves of a little book of sonnets and marked a passage beginning, "The look she hath when she a little smiles,—" and wrote the date on the margin. By doing that he rather gave himself away.

Susan went to bed thinking about the fortune-teller. Could Miss Margaret have told Miss Julia?

CHAPTER XXVI

DICK

How little for the clouds we care
When they are past and all is fair.

It was one of those cool days in late September, when after the long, hot summer the world begins to take heart again and feel tingles of energy along its spine. The rain of the night before had freshened the yellowing trees and renewed the grass, and washed the sky till it was the bluest blue.

Susan, walking along North Street, was enjoying the day without thinking about it. In her mind the refrain, "Holliday is coming tomorrow," was repeating itself over and over. Holliday, whom she had not seen for three long months. Susan, too, had been away on a visit to Grandmother and Aunt Emily and was still feeling the pleasant excitement of being at home again.

She was on her way to the Brocade Lady's now, after stopping in to see the Selfs and Susie Flynn.

Himself she found was getting about a little, with the aid of crutches, and Herself wore a new ice wool fascinator. The house had been painted inside and out so that you hardly knew the place, and there were new tenants upstairs; but when Susan remarked upon the improved appearance of things, Herself did not respond cordially. Folks could afford to paint houses they was getting for nothing, she said, and it had been a terrible bother moving the books.

"It belongs to you as long as you live, doesn't it?" Susan asked. "I am sure that is the way I understood it."

"Oh, yes, he's counting on us dying, he is, and I ain't going to die to please him or no one else," Mrs. Self declared stoutly.

Susan felt embarrassed at this defiant attitude. Old Look-in-a-Book, too, seemed depressed, perhaps by the cleanness of the window in which his cage hung. He gave his customary advice in a half-hearted way, as if by no means convinced himself that it was worth while to resort to the printed page. Susan handed over the picture papers she had saved for Himself, and was glad to escape.

At the Flynns' it was different. Susie's

chair was out in the back yard under a ragged old sycamore tree, and in her lap was a Maltese kitten which she said Miss Aline had brought her the day before,—a brother of her own Grayson. “I want a pretty name for him, Miss Susan,” Susie said. “Can’t you tell me one?”

Susan sat on the grass and looked up into the branches of the tree. “Why not call him Gray Brother?” she said.

Susie laughed. “Little Gray Brother,” she repeated, “that is a nice name.”

The Flynns’ back yard was a pleasant corner with its hop vines, and a bed of scarlet sage along the fence, and the neatly reddened walk. Susan stayed for half an hour and then went on her way.

Past Browinski’s she went, stopping a moment to glance at the goodies in the window, and wonder if Sophy Idelle was at home. A block farther on was Christmas Tree House, looking very dignified and reserved, and quite as if it had never heard of a ghost. The new cedar trees were doing finely, and everything about the place was in the trimmest order.

The Seymours’ had a half-open look. Mr.

and Mrs. Seymour were there for a few weeks, then it would be closed again for the winter. Only the day before a package containing a little twisted gold bracelet with "Elsie" on the clasp had come to Susan. Mrs. Seymour's card was inclosed, and on it she had written, "For Susan. A little remembrance of her friend." She had sent something to each of the Circle. Susan wore her bracelet now, and the fingers of her other hand touched it every few minutes with a feeling of pleasure. Elsie's bracelet and Holliday's ring might stand as symbols for her year's experience,—the year which had begun with the red diary and her wish. Perhaps Susan did not quite think this out, but she felt it.

At the Brocade Lady's there was no one at home, but Nancy thought Miss Margaret would be in before long, so Susan said she would wait. In the sitting-room it was very quiet, and the most absolute order prevailed. The lion on the hearth rug seemed sunk in deepest repose. Rows of dignified volumes held themselves aloof behind the glass doors of the tall cases; in the magazine racks were piles of *Littell's Living Age* and *Harper's*

Monthly in a chronological order that you hesitated to disturb. Just outside the hall door the clock ticked "Virtue is its own reward."

Susan took the top *Harper's* and sat down on an ottoman near the window. On the sofa she saw a book with a handkerchief between its leaves. Circumstantial evidence pointed to Miss Margaret; the Brocade Lady never left handkerchiefs in books.

Twisting her bracelet absently, Susan fell into a dream from which the opening door aroused her. She peeped around the Brocade Lady's chair expecting to see Miss Margaret, but instead, of all persons in the world, it was Dick Seymour! Her heart jumped up into her throat and she sat very still on her ottoman.

Dick looked tall and thin and brown as he advanced to the table and stood there. He did not see Susan, who was a small person and quite hidden by the armchair. Was he going to wait for Miss Margaret, too? And what could she say or do? Susan looked down at her bracelet. The sight of those graceful letters on the clasp somehow gave her courage.

She stood up. "Dick!" she said softly and appealingly.

He turned with a start. "Why, Susan!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know you were here," and he came forward holding out his hand.

"I came in to wait for Miss Margaret," Susan explained, and then stood shyly twisting her bracelet. She felt Dick's eyes upon it, and extending her arm she said, "Your mother sent it to me."

Dick replied, "Yes."

Susan plucked up her courage. "Dick, there's something I want to tell you. It is about that day at the rink. I am sorry I was so horrid. There was something I didn't understand. I thought—" Susan hesitated. It was so difficult to explain.

But Dick met her more than halfway. "It is all right, Susan. I did think you were awfully queer and I was pretty mad, but Aline told me about it the other day."

Susan's cheeks flamed, as Dick went on: "She said that she and Bessie told you they were going to telephone to me that you wanted me to come and skate with you, or some such

nonsense, and you thought they really had. I should have known it was a joke if they had," he added, laughing. "I'd never suspect you of such a thing."

Susan laughed too. "I'm afraid I am a goose," she said, "but I didn't want you to think—"

"That you liked to skate with me?" he finished. "Oh, well, never mind. I only wish I was to be here next winter, but I shall have to stay at school, I guess. All the rest of them will be in Paris."

After this they settled down to friendly talk, Her Shyness looking very sweet as she sat in the Brocade Lady's chair, her hands demurely crossed in her lap, while Dick occupied the ottoman.

Susan was doubtful whether or not to mention Elsie, but Dick spoke of her himself. "She liked you so much, Susan,—you and Holliday," he said.

Susan told him about the poem that made them think of Elsie, and then found it for him in the Brocade Lady's Wordsworth, which happened to be at hand.

" 'Fair as a star,' " Dick repeated; "I never

cared much for poetry, but that *is* like Elsie, I see. She was so different from everybody else,—that is, in our family. You are a little like her, I think.”

Like Elsie? It was incredible, Susan thought, but she flushed with pleasure.

Then Miss Margaret came in and proved to be the same dear, charming person, only dearer and more charming, if possible. She fitted in most perfectly and they were in the midst of the happiest sort of talk, when Colonel Brand walked in. It was provoking when there were such quantities of things to be discussed in which he had no interest. Still, there was nothing for it but to give him the right of way.

Dick walked home with Susan and when they parted at the gate he said he hoped he would see her again before he left for school.

It really seemed as if there was nothing left to be sorry about now. It was nice of Aline, Susan felt, to explain to Dick. She was evidently trying to show her friendliness.

Holliday's advent added a zest to everything. Susan and Joe went down to meet the train, and for a second, when Holliday's sparkling face appeared behind her father on

the platform of the car, Susan had a fit of shyness, and that queer impulse to run away; but of course she couldn't, and with Holliday hugging her and exclaiming, "Oh, Susan, I have such lots and lots to tell you," the enemy subsided.

At first sight Holliday looked alarmingly grown up. She was half a head taller than Susan and her dresses were longer. Her pretty hair was braided and tied with lovely bows that took yards of ribbon, as Bessie remarked enviously. Being one of ten, five of whom were girls, limited the ribbon supply for Bessie.

Holliday came flying over to see Mother. She petted Wynkyns, ran out to the kitchen to speak to Silvy, and upstairs to see Susan's new rain-coat. Then the two subsided into the swinging seat, from which for an hour or more came a continuous ripple of laughter.

After a while Bessie and Lily joined them, and Charlie Willard, hearing sounds of merriment, poked his freckled face between the vines with, "Hello! you all."

Bessie and Charlie had been at home all summer, and had a good deal of news to commu-

nicate to the returned travelers. For one thing Miss Julia Anderson was going to be married.

“Miss Katie Flynn is sewing there now,” Bessie said. “Miss Julia is going to show us all her trousseau; she told me so, and she has perfectly lovely things. Sister Laura is to be one of her bridesmaids.”

“Who is she going to marry?” Susan wanted to know. “Is it the—”

“No, indeed,” interrupted Charlie. “Do you mean Mr. Reynor? Not much. It’s a Chicago man.”

Susan remembered the Poet’s melancholy “Yes,” when she asked him if he had consulted the fortune-teller. She liked the Poet, and felt sorry for him.

“Have you heard about Mrs. Carrol?” continued Charlie. “Christmas Tree House, you know. Well, she has gone crazy sure enough.”

“Has anybody seen the Christmas tree lately?” asked Holliday.

“No, for the colonel keeps the shutters closed, but somebody told Mother his house-keeper said she would have to leave, it was so

hard to get servants," Charlie answered.

"Do you believe in that tree?"

"Of course I do. I saw it,—Susan and I."

"Did you know Dick Seymour was here? I saw him yesterday," Lily remarked, and Susan said she had seen him, too.

"He's going back to school to-morrow," Charlie added.

"I wish I could see him. I like Dick," said Holliday.

Bessie, twisting one of Lily's curls around her finger, remarked that she didn't see anything so great about Dick Seymour.

"Sure the grapes are perfectly ripe, Bessie?" laughed Charlie, not very gallantly, and Holliday chimed in with, "How about last winter, Bessie? You liked him pretty well then."

"I guess I can change my mind if I want to," said Bessie, turning her back upon Charlie. "Anyway, Susan is the one who was so crazy about him."

Susan had learned her lesson. "I don't think I am crazy about him, but I like him ever so much," she said steadily.

"And I'm going to tell Grandma, Charlie

Willard, how rude you are," announced Lily.

"What is going on here?" asked Miss Margaret's voice, opportunely, and she was forthwith given an uproarious welcome and installed in the swinging seat beside Holliday.

Charlie, remembering the errand he had set out to do an hour before, departed and left them free to talk school matters.

Miss Margaret was to have her class again, but this year she was to give all her attention to her older pupils, with three or four additions to their number.

"And we can meet in our old room, at any rate till the first of the year," she said. "After that they are talking of altering St. Mark's, lowering the floor of the church and building a new chapel."

"I am glad we shall not have to give up our Wise Man this winter," Holliday said. "Everybody thinks it is the queerest thing to have a grave in a schoolroom, but I think he has helped us to study hard."

"We can take our text with us wherever we go," Miss Margaret replied.

One of the new girls was Clarice Dumont. Susan, though she was quite sure of Holli-

day's affection now, wished things could go on in the old way. She didn't like changes.

That evening Dick came in with Charlie Willard to say good-by. Mother was on the porch. Dick wanted to know if Susan would not write to him. "Just once in a while. It is so lonely, you know, with your people all so far away." He looked at Mrs. Maxwell as he spoke.

"I am afraid Susan won't have much time for letters," she said, but she did not say positively "no."

"You don't really want to write to him, do you, Susan?" she asked after the boys had gone. "You hardly know him."

"Why, yes, Mother, I believe I do. I think I know him pretty well," was Susan's reply.

CHAPTER XXVII

BEING A SISTER

Bad fortune often turns to good,
When with brave hearts we take it.
In very truth the thing called luck
Is largely what we make it.

"SUSAN, have you the gold piece Aunt Henrietta sent you at Christmas?" Father asked the question with startling suddenness, looking over his paper.

Susan hesitated. She had been wondering about that gold piece herself. "I—why, no, Father, I haven't," she replied.

"Have you spent it?"

"Not exactly. I have been thinking of getting some little Shakespeares. Holliday's uncle gave her a lovely set, all bound in leather."

"'Not exactly' is silly, Susan. I have a reason for wishing to know what you have done with that money."

When Father spoke in that tone, which was seldom, no hedging was possible. Susan had to own that her brother had borrowed it.

"But he is going to pay it back I am sure," she urged. "And I'm not in any hurry for the books."

"I thought as much," Mr. Maxwell said, paying no attention to the last part of her remark, and on his face was an expression that always made Susan unhappy when she saw it. It was usually Joe who called it forth. He returned to his paper again, but looked up to add kindly, "Don't worry about the gold piece, my pet. You shall not lose it."

"Oh, I don't mind at all. Please don't *you* mind," was Susan's reply.

This conversation caused her to awaken to the fact that something was wrong in the family. She had been so occupied with the opening of school, the arrival of Holliday's aunt, who was to spend the winter at the Heywoods', and all the various pleasant everyday happenings, that she had been only dimly conscious of it. Now she was suddenly aware that Father's face had worn that stern expression rather constantly of late, while Mother looked anxious and worried. Joe, too, had been unlike his usual sunny self. Very little at home, he was alternately gloomy and hilarious.

Money it was plain had something to do with it. Susan had heard that this year the times were hard, for some mysterious reason, but she had heard it too often before to pay much attention.

The trouble culminated in Joe's losing his place at the bank. Retrenchment was the order of the day everywhere, and not having made his services invaluable Joe was dispensed with. This was a shock to Susan, who had had a feeling that the bank could hardly run without Joe.

Joe was inclined to lay the blame upon everybody but himself. He despised such methods as Colonel Brand's. Always nosing about, stingy old miser that he was!

Father retorted that the colonel was perfectly right to clear out the dead wood. Clerks who cared more for pleasure than for business and set an example of extravagant habits, were likely to find themselves left out. It was very necessary that bank officials should inquire into the characters of their employees.

"Do you mean to insinuate—?" cried Joe.

"I insinuate nothing. I only say that if you call it honest, sir, to buy things which you

have not the money to pay for, your ideas and mine differ."

"Don't be too hard on him, dear," Mother said, as Joe left the room, closing the door emphatically behind him. "Perhaps this will be a lesson to him."

"It is I who have had the lesson, Kitty, and a very bitter one," was Mr. Maxwell's reply.

"Father, I am sure he is sorry," Susan ventured to say. "He told me he was."

"I fear his kind of 'sorry' will not help matters much. But don't worry your little head about it." Father did not realize how fast Susan was growing up, and how along with the letting down of her dresses a responsibility in regard to family burdens was developing.

Susan was proud of Joe. All the girls envied her her gay, handsome, entertaining brother. It was painful to find he was not much of a hero after all. But when he put his head in her lap and declared he was a flat failure and no good on earth, she felt dreadfully sorry for him.

"I know you will find another place, Joe, and there's your novel. Can't you go to work and finish it?" she suggested.

"I am afraid, Susan Hermione, that novel is a grand fizzle. It wasn't so easy as I thought, and anyway now I am not in the mood. It is just my luck," he continued. "Because a fellow hates to be mean he gets into a lot of trouble. I am awfully sorry about your gold piece, Hermie, and you shall have it back if I have to work my fingers to the bone."

"I don't mind about that at all," Susan hastened to say. "I'd rather you would pay other things first."

She ventured to ask Mother if Joe owed much money.

"I don't know, I fear there are a good many bills, dear," she replied, adding, "You and I must be patient with him. Perhaps I helped to spoil him when he was little. When he came to me he was the dearest eight-year-old you ever saw, but not easy to manage, because he had been so indulged. I know I excused faults in him I should never have overlooked in you, because I wasn't his own mother. The spoiling has gone on all these years, and now we must be patient and remember it is not altogether his fault that he puts his own pleasure first, for he was taught to do it in

babyhood. We believe, you and I, that there is good stuff in him, so we must love him and try to help him. It is hard on Father, the disappointment coming just now when he is worried over business. We must try to help them both."

Thinking it over by herself, Susan wished she could make a little money in some way. She wondered, too, about luck. What was it? According to Joe, Colonel Brand was lucky and he himself wasn't. Mother said there was no such thing, but surely there was something you called by that name for lack of a better. Susan propounded the question to Holliday, but got no light from that quarter. Some persons were luckier than others, of course, that was clear, but what made them so was another matter.

It happened curiously enough that Susan's question was answered by Colonel Brand,—after a fashion, that is.

It was one afternoon when she and Holliday went to Self and Son's with something for the old people.

The Circle of the Golden Thimble, enlarged by the addition of the new members of Miss

Margaret's class, had begun their meetings again and were working for a little sale of their own to be held in the spring, and Miss Margaret had begun another Dickens. Besides, each week some one or two of their number visited the Selfs and Susie Flynn.

Those hours spent in the Brocade Lady's sitting-room were well spent. There unconsciously the gentle art of being a lady was acquired and the habit of being thoughtful for others. Miss Margaret said it was good for the Brocade Lady too, to have those merry young people about once a week. She seemed a trifle depressed these days.

Fortunately, Holliday said, Aunt Nan approved of Miss Margaret and pronounced her really exquisite. Mrs. Lawrence's presence at the Heywoods' was the most strikingly new feature of this winter. She was affable, but so suggestive of state occasions Susan never felt quite at ease with her. It was impossible to imagine her sitting on the floor as Miss Margaret did, to look over the Brocade Lady's piece bag. A throne would have been the place for her, and there was always the length of a scepter between her and you.

Aunt Nan was frequently bored. She couldn't find what she wanted in the shops, and Susan felt ashamed of the poor facilities the town offered, though it seemed to her if she had the money she could do very well herself. The markets too were limited, and the barbarian custom of dinner in the middle of the day shocked Aunt Nan.

The first occasion of dining at the Heywoods' after Mrs. Lawrence's arrival was an event to Susan. At Grandmother's dinner was a stately meal in an old-fashioned way, but not like this. There were candles on the table, and flowers, and little else. It seemed solemn, almost religious, and took a long time and a great many plates. Susan had to watch Holliday to be sure she was using the right spoon or fork. Mrs. Lawrence was dressed as for a party, but it turned out she was not going anywhere. She always dressed for dinner.

There could be no doubt about it, Holliday liked to escape from Aunt Nan's rule at times, and do plain everyday things in a plain everyday way. Even to chatting with the Selfs in their dingy little parlor back of the shop!

It was a chilly, threatening afternoon when

Susan, with a loaf of brown bread, and Holliday, with some papers, set the bell jangling and woke the parrot.

Mrs. Self asked them into the back room to see her husband. It cheered him up a bit to have a chat with somebody now and then, she told them. Himself was more than usually like a venerable bird, propped in his chair by a window which overlooked a not very tidy back yard. He was extremely deaf and frequently ejaculated "Hey?" in a manner that caused Susan to forget what she had been trying to say. Holliday did not mind in the least, but cheerfully repeated her remarks in a higher key.

The blaze in the open Franklin stove was pleasantly reflected in the crayon portrait of Johnnie on the opposite wall; on the braided mat a most ordinary black and white cat lay asleep. It is wonderful how comfortable a blazing fire and a sleeping cat can make a dingy room appear.

"Wouldn't it be lovely to keep a store?—just you and me, with a parlor back of it," Holliday whispered.

The bell at that moment proclaimed another

customer, and Holliday laughingly tip-toed after Herself to see who it might be. "Susan!" she exclaimed in a stage whisper, "it is Colonel Brand."

The colonel had been told the Selfs had an old sideboard they had no use for and he had called to see it with a view to purchasing, if he liked it. Mrs. Self was most deferential, not to say obsequious, in her manner. Susan wondered, remembering how she had spoken of the colonel.

Herself was sure she hadn't anything the colonel would want, but she would speak to Himself, and thereupon ushered him into the parlor, from the door of which the listeners retired pell-mell with suppressed giggles.

Colonel Brand not unnaturally looked surprised, and Holliday, recovering herself, politely observed that they had not seen him since the picnic.

He twisted his mustache and replied that he had been out of town. He declined to sit down, he had only a moment. He asked Himself how he was, and the old man gave a gloomy account of his health.

"It looks like some has luck and some

hasn't," old Mrs. Self remarked pensively.

"Do you believe in luck, Colonel Brand?" demanded Holliday the audacious. "Susan and I have just been talking about it."

He regarded her sternly. "To believe in luck is to build your house upon the sand," he replied, emphasizing his words with a thump of his neatly rolled umbrella. "There are matters, like the throws in a game of backgammon, which are beyond our control, and which go now for us and now against us, according to some law we do not understand, and with which therefore we have no concern. But often what seems at one moment most unlucky turns out at the next through a new combination of circumstances to be fortunate."

Susan's blue eyes were fixed on the colonel's face. It was an interesting thought that bad fortune might turn out to be good after all.

With an air of having settled the question, he returned to business and the sideboard. This was indeed a dilapidated piece of furniture, so forlorn that it had been banished to the back porch, where the chickens sometimes roosted in it. A gentleman with plenty of money couldn't have any use for a thing like

this, Mrs. Self was confident, and Susan agreed with her. But Colonel Brand seemed interested. He said if she was willing to sell he would send a cabinet maker to look at it.

Susan thought he must be very anxious to help the Selfs, but Holliday said he liked old things. They were the fashion, she added, and you called them antiques.

Susan thought over what the colonel had said about luck in the light of her own experience, and came to the conclusion that it was true. There was Aline's secret that cost her so much, and yet if it had not been for it Aline would not have been grateful and tried to make up by explaining to Dick, so that he was ready to meet her more than halfway.

"Joe, perhaps your bad luck will turn into good. It does sometimes," she observed reassuringly that evening.

Joe shook his head. "I am afraid not, Your Shyness. I'm a bad lot. It seems to me," he added, "that if I had one more chance I'd buckle down and do my best and amount to something, but maybe I wouldn't."

This tone of humility was new, and it caused Susan to wish more earnestly than ever that

she had some money. Then she remembered her candlesticks. They were very old; would Colonel Brand like to buy them? Holliday said all sorts of old things, in furniture, silver and china.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LOST LENORE

'Tis strange indeed without a doubt,
How cherished secrets sometimes out.

PERHAPS Susan ought to have known better, or at least she should have asked advice of some one, but feeling that her candlesticks were her own to do as she pleased with, and being naturally a reserved little person, she did not mention it even to Mother, who had enough to worry her.

She thought about it for several days before she really made up her mind to go to see the colonel. She was very much afraid of him and of Christmas Tree House, but she wanted so earnestly to help Joe, that this desire overcame to some degree the fear. She had not the least idea of the value of her candlesticks nor the amount of her brother's debts, but her hopes soared high in the shape of a beautiful air-castle. How surprised and grateful Joe would be, and Father perhaps would cheer up, and Mother get a new bonnet instead of wear-

ing her last winter's one. Of course Susan was a goose, but who isn't sometimes? and her experience with money was small.

Susan would have liked to tell Holliday and ask her to go with her, but this was a family matter, of which she felt she could not speak even to her best friend.

So it happened that one afternoon, with her candlesticks carefully wrapped in tissue paper, she stood before the colonel's stately front door, her heart beating very fast indeed. From between the massive pillars the street looked unfamiliar, and she felt exceedingly small and far away. Suppose some one she knew should pass and look up! Holliday was safely at the dentist's, and Bessie had gone home with Lily for over Sunday, but—wasn't that the Brocade Lady coming? Susan withdrew to the farthest corner of the vestibule. Her courage was oozing away. After the Brocade Lady was safely by without looking in her direction, she began to hope Colonel Brand was not at home.

He was, however, and a solemn butler,—a white man, which seemed odd,—showed her into a large room which was as full of things

as the Browinski parlor. There were no painted banners or gilded stools, but the walls were covered with paintings, there were richly carved cabinets and vases as tall as herself, bronzes, embroidered screens and hangings, uniting in an effect of soft, rich color. A great change had taken place in the house since that day more than a year ago when she and Holliday and Lily had so unexpectedly found themselves shut in there.

Susan sat timidly on the edge of a chair and little shivers began to creep up and down her spine as she thought of the room across the hall where the mysterious Christmas tree stood. She actually started to her feet at the sound of a musical chime which announced three o'clock. As she sat down again the quiet grew oppressive and she remembered that strange dark man she and Holliday had seen entering the basement door on Christmas Eve. Suppose— But what was that queer pit-pat, and that sound of heavy breathing? Again Susan's heart was in her throat. The next minute she almost laughed with relief as the benevolent eyes of Dane, the colonel's big dog, looked up at her.

She put her arms around his neck and he tried to lick her face. She didn't feel afraid now, but she presently began to wonder if Colonel Brand could possibly care for her candlesticks when he already possessed so many beautiful things.

If the master of Christmas Tree House was surprised to see his small visitor, he did not betray it, but asked her pardon for keeping her waiting, with as ceremonious a politeness as if she had been the Brocade Lady. Some persons are always seen to the best advantage in their own homes, and this must have been true of the colonel, for he seemed bent upon putting his caller at ease, taking her along the hall to his library, where hundreds of books imparted a friendliness to the atmosphere. Dane, who accompanied them, stretched himself at ease before the wood fire, looking from Susan to his master as if to ask, "Now isn't this pleasant?"

"Dane likes company," the colonel remarked, placing a chair for her. Then he went on to speak of the weather and about the alterations he heard were to be made at St.

Mark's, until Susan despaired of ever getting to her business.

Finally, with some abruptness she stated it. "I brought some candlesticks to show you," she said, with very pink cheeks. "I heard you liked old things, and they are very old. They belonged to my great-great-grandmother." She unrolled the tissue paper as she spoke.

Colonel Brand took the one she held out to him. "It is very nice," he said. "Is it your own?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, wondering if he thought she would sell other people's candlesticks.

"If they have been in your family so long, it seems a pity to part with them," he remarked, setting the candlestick on the table and looking gravely at Susan.

"I don't care much for old things," she said. "I'd rather have the money."

"I should hardly suppose little girls like you had much use for money, except perhaps for candy."

The color in Susan's cheeks deepened. Did he think her such a *little* girl? "I don't want it for myself at all," she explained.

"Ah, you wish to help some one, I suppose."

"Yes," faltered Susan, "I want to help my brother." The next minute she wished desperately that she had not said it. She rose. "I guess I oughtn't to have come," she said. "I am afraid Mother will not like it."

"It was quite right for you to come," the colonel assured her. "Sit down again; I want to show you something. I have some candlesticks very much like these." He went to a tall cabinet which Susan directly faced, and opened one of its doors, when, of all astonishing things! out tumbled Lenore. The colonel caught her, thus no doubt saving her life, and stood holding her awkwardly, looking like a sheepish schoolboy.

Susan gave one little exclamation, then tried to appear as if she thought it the most natural thing in the world for dignified gentlemen to have dolls in their possession. Dane rose from the hearth rug and advancing, sniffed in a lofty manner at Lenore's skirts.

With the doll under his arm, the colonel shut the door of the cabinet, apparently forgetting what he had come for. While his back was turned, Susan indulged in a little smile, he

looked so funny, and she was caught in the act.

“I suppose it is funny,” he said rather tragically, placing Lenore on the sofa. “You see I intended it for my niece whom I had not seen for some years. It seems I had not taken into account the flight of time, for the day after I bought the doll I received the news of her expected marriage. Rather a joke, wasn’t it? I haven’t the least idea what to do with it now.”

Susan really felt sorry for the colonel. She knew what it was to fear being laughed at. But he looked absurdly helpless. “I didn’t know you bought it,” she said. “We wondered and wondered what had become of her.”

He had sent a man over, he explained, adding that probably she didn’t know any one who wanted a doll.

Know any one? “Why, Susie Flynn would just love her!” Susan cried.

What a sociable little party they made in this handsome but austere room. Her Shyness and the colonel facing each other in large armchairs, conversing pleasantly, Dane on his haunches before them gazing inquiringly from



“‘I SUPPOSE IT IS FUNNY,’ HE SAID RATHER TRAGICALLY.”

one to the other, while Lenore, beautiful as ever, though slightly rumpled as to clothes, rested placidly on the sofa.

Susan explained who Susie was, and her host asked questions about her and other matters, and somehow Miss Margaret's name came in more than once.

"To return to the candlesticks," the colonel said presently, taking from Susan the one she held and proceeding to wrap the two together, "you must not sell them. You would be sorry some day. By the way, your brother is Joseph Maxwell, who used to be in our bank, is he not?"

Susan said "Yes," and added, "If you should hear of another place I hope you will let him have it. I think if he had another chance he would do better?"

"Why do you think so?" The colonel looked at her intently.

"Because he is sorry, and he isn't so sure about things." She found it difficult to express what she meant, and concluded lamely, "He is very good to me."

"I am glad to hear it. He is a lucky fellow."

What would Joe have said to this? Lucky!

"I will keep him in mind," the colonel went on, "and if I hear of something, and I rather expect to, I'll let him know. But don't worry your head about it." His glance was very kindly as he placed the candlesticks in her hand.

"Thank you," Susan said, rising, "and it was very good of you to buy our doll." She hesitated a moment and then added, "If I were you I'd tell about it and let them laugh. It is really the best way, Miss Margaret says."

The colonel regarded her quizzically. "I have no doubt she is right," he replied.

Susan went home with a very light heart, glad on the whole that she had not sold her heirlooms, and feeling somehow confident that Colonel Brand would find something for her brother. The more she thought of it the more certain she became that Mother would not have approved of her going to Colonel Brand's, and presently she began to wonder how she had ever dared to do it. Yet he was very kind and pleasant. Joe was mistaken about him.

That very evening Mother remarked at the tea-table, that poor Mrs. Brown was trying to

sell her family silver, and Father replied, "You don't say so! I did not suppose it had come to that."

Was it then a disgrace to sell your silver? Susan felt uncomfortable.

CHAPTER XXIX

JOE'S LUCK

Experience to all doth teach
There's ever something out of reach.

FROM the sofa corner, with pillows tucked behind her and a Roman blanket over her feet, Susan watched Silvy brushing up the crumbs and restoring order after dinner. The fish-woman looked down with her complacent smile, the fire crackled softly; the winter sunshine streamed in through the bay window full of thrifty plants, and within easy reach lay a new story-book. Susan heaved a sign of content. What more could an invalid desire?—unless it was a visitor, and Holliday was coming presently.

Being ill is a trying experience, but getting well is at times a delightful process. Susan had just escaped pneumonia, Dr. Thomas said, but the point was, she had escaped, and was now recovering so rapidly that she had been allowed to come down to the dining-room on condition she stayed on the sofa.

She had felt very weak and languid as she stood before the mirror to tie the blue bows which Joe declared made her look like herself again, but now, after chicken soup and other nourishing viands, she began to feel as she looked.

Silvy placed a bowl of pink roses on the table and dusted the hearth as a final touch, and Susan said, "Send Wynkyns in after he has his dinner, please, Silvy." How lovely those roses were! They had come last evening with Colonel Brand's card in the box.

The thing Susan was most happy about, however, was not the roses, lovely as they were, but some news Joe brought home shortly before their arrival. He had come running upstairs two steps at a time and into Susan's room, where Father was reading his paper and Mother embroidering, with something like his old gayety.

"Well, how's Your Shyness, this evening?" he asked, and then walked to the fireplace and stood gazing into it for a full minute without speaking.

Mother asked if it was cold out, and he replied, "Not particularly." Then, facing

about, he announced abruptly, "Well, I've got a place."

Father lowered his paper, Mother dropped her scissors, and Susan, sitting up, exclaimed, "Joe, I am so glad! I just knew it."

"I'd like to know what you know about it?" Joe said, smiling down on her.

"Well, we're waiting," put in Father, a little as if he doubted whether there was much to hear.

Joe sat down on the side of Susan's couch and took possession of one of her hands. He seemed to find it difficult to begin. "It isn't anything great," he said, adding with a laugh, "Not that I am likely to have a great offer, but it's a chance."

"Well," said Father, impatiently, "who offers it, whatever it is?"

"Colonel Brand. I'll take back some of the things I have said about him. He was very kind. He sent for me to come to his office and we had a long talk. He said he knew people often made mistakes at the start and that he had an idea—dear knows where he got it—that if I had another chance I'd make good. Anyway, he said he was willing

to try me if I was willing to undertake a tough piece of work."

"And you will try hard this time, won't you?" Susan squeezed the fingers that clasped hers.

"I am ashamed to make any more promises, Susan Hermione, but I am going to try," Joe answered, and he went on to explain that the position the colonel offered him was in a small Western mining town. It meant loneliness and hardship as well as responsibility, for a year or two, with a prospect of something well worth while in the future for the man who faithfully filled the place.

"By the way, when did you come to be such a friend of Colonel Brand's?" Joe interrupted himself to ask. "When I thanked him and said I'd be glad to try, but should like to speak to my father first, he smiled and said it was my resemblance to my sister, or something of the sort, that made him think of offering it to me."

Susan looked embarrassed. "I'm not much of a friend, but I think he is very kind."

"I didn't suppose you knew him at all, Susan," Mrs. Maxwell remarked. "Joe, dear,

I can't bear the thought of your going so far away."

"I am afraid you will be happier without me, Mother Kitty," Joe answered humbly. "What do you think of it, Father?" and he went into further particulars.

"It seems like a fine chance for the right person, my boy."

"I can't expect you to believe in me just yet, but if you don't object I am going to try it," Joe said.

"And now tell us what you had to do with it, Susan?" demanded her father, who had been watching her face.

There was no help for it, the whole story had to come out. Though she told it with fear and trembling, her conscience grew lighter with every word.

"Your great-grandmother's candlesticks, Susan, and you said nothing to me! I can't understand it. What must Colonel Brand have thought!" Mother's face grew crimson.

Joe, too, was aghast. "Good heavens, Susan! He must think we are paupers. And *you* to do a thing like that."

"I told him I heard he liked old things, and

then when he asked why I wanted to sell them I had to tell him. I couldn't help it, really Joe,—and he didn't think that,—and then I asked him if he heard of anything to let you know. I'm sorry." Tears filled Susan's eyes and her voice choked.

"And the silliness of it!" cried Joe, not noticing the tears. "How much do you think those candlesticks would have brought?"

"Not unnaturally she put too low an estimate upon the amount of debt a young man would be willing to assume," Father broke in coolly. "I can't see that there is any harm done,—you aren't disgraced, Kitty. Don't cry, Susan. If you made a slight mistake, at least your brother owes something to it. On the whole it strikes me the game is worth the candlesticks, as it turns out." Mr. Maxwell was inclined to take the matter humorously.

But Susan, being weak from her illness, cried so hard they all had to unite in pacifying her. Mother acknowledged that selling a pair of old candlesticks was not so bad as having to part with the family silver service, as in Mrs. Brown's case.

"But *you*, Susan! How did you ever have

the face to do it? That is what gets me," Joe exclaimed, as Susan dried her tears.

"I think I understand," said Father, touching her brow with his lips in a caress rather rare with him.

"I am glad you told Colonel Brand, Susan, that you had not consulted any one," said Mrs. Maxwell.

Then the roses were brought in. This was not exactly the attention paid to paupers, Father pointed out, and Joe said that Susan had certainly made an impression on the colonel, and maybe she would be Mrs. Colonel when he came home on a visit from Colorado.

Susan couldn't help laughing at this absurd idea.

She was thinking of all this and looking at her roses, when the door opened to admit Holiday, her cheeks glowing from the frosty air, and Wynkyns in her arms.

"My darling Susan," she cried, spilling Wynk on the Roman blanket and stooping to hug her. "I can't live another day without you. Everything is too stupid. Why, you don't look sick a bit,—I should say *ill*. Aunt Nan is forever telling me about it. I am sure,

though, sick is in the Bible, and Mr. Bright says it is a something of pure English,—a well, was it?”

“You sound like Lily with your ‘something,’” Susan said, laughing. “I am not ill or sick either, but almost as well as ever. Do please tell me everything that has happened.”

Holliday drew up a footstool to the sofa. “Well,” she said, “the first thing is that Colonel Brand is a dear, with his hand organs and monkeys, and buying Lenore without a word to anybody. Miss Margaret told you about that, didn’t she? Papa laughed and laughed when he heard it, and he *will* tease the colonel; I can’t make him stop. And Susan, it is too bad you couldn’t have seen Susie Flynn! She was so happy she couldn’t say anything at first; she simply hugged Lenore and smiled.”

Miss Margaret had told Susan about the colonel’s coming to see her and telling the story of the purchase of the doll, and that he wished her to be given to Susie. Evidently he had not mentioned Susan in the connection at all, for which she was grateful.

“And then Miss Julia’s wedding. It is a shame you had to miss that,” Holliday went

on. "Of course you have heard about it."

"Joe said Miss Julia looked dandy," Susan answered, smiling, "and she sent me a piece of wedding cake to dream on, and some other good things, which I was too sick to eat."

Holliday was in the midst of a graphic description of the wedding when Silvy announced Aline Arthur. Susan would have preferred to have Holliday by herself. Still, as they all agreed, Aline was nicer than she used to be, and in an odd way of her own she showed a real friendship for Susan. To-day she had a basket of country dainties for the invalid. She talked very little but coaxed Wynk into her lap, and sat and stroked him while she listened to the others.

Then Lily arrived, arrayed in her new blue velvet suit, which became her blonde beauty extremely well. She was out making calls with her grandmother, something she adored. Last of all came Miss Margaret, who stayed after the others left, waiting for the Brocade Lady, who was to stop on her way from the infirmary.

So it happened that Joe found her chatting with Susan in the firelight. Like Aline, for some reason, he found very little to say, but

then he had not been like himself of late. Miss Margaret asked about the new position and congratulated him upon the opportunity it offered. If she were a man she certainly would go west, she said, and then she went on to prophesy gayly that he would come back to see them some day as Senator Maxwell.

Joe did not seem pleased. He remarked that he thought his friends were a little too eager to resign him to a life in the wilderness. The prospect was not pure delight to him. Susan looked at him in surprise.

Miss Margaret lifted her brows. "Is not that a foolish way to talk?" she asked severely. "What sort of friends would they be who were not glad when a chance like this came to you? We can be glad to have you go and yet miss you very much at the same time. Can we not, Susan?"

When she left Susan's sharp ears heard her say to Joe in the hall, "Don't think me unkind in what I said to you the other night. I want to be your friend. I am going to be, even though you think you do not care for my friendship, and the time will come when you will see that I am right."

More than once Susan had wondered about Joe and Miss Margaret; she was weighing these words when Joe returned with Mother, and began to tell them about his last interview with Colonel Brand.

It seemed the colonel had spoken plainly. There was little hope of success for a man who put his pleasures before his duty, who counted on luck, and lacked strength to deny himself. "Digging is not easy work, but if you would have a good foundation you must dig for it," said the colonel.

"That is like our Wise Man," commented Susan.

"I trust my boy is going to be a wise man after this," Mother said, patting his shoulder.

Joe accepted all the sermons and good advice with a wonderful meekness. He had been in the habit of considering Joe Maxwell a very good fellow, and prided himself upon being unselfish, by which he meant that he was lavish with his money when he had it, and sometimes when he hadn't. Now he was beginning to see that all his life he had been doing just those things that it pleased him to do. Flowers for Mother and candy for Susan were

pleasant attentions, of course, if he could afford them, but after all the greatest kindness he could do them or any of his friends was to attend to his plain duty day by day.

"You perhaps look upon me as a fortunate man," Colonel Brand told him, "but I would give all I possess for family ties like yours and for your gift for making friends."

Mother went upstairs, and Joe remained staring rather soberly into the fire.

"What made you cross to Miss Margaret, Joe?" Susan ventured.

At first he did not answer, then he came and sat down by Susan and put his head down on her pillow. "I have been an awful fool, Your Shyness," he said. "She doesn't care anything about me. She thinks I am only a boy. She wouldn't care if I were going to the Cannibal Islands. Now don't you breathe this, Susan," he added.

Susan rumbled his hair and comforted him to the best of her ability, feeling quite old and wise. She was sorry, and yet if Miss Margaret married Joe she would have to go to Colorado.

Later, a scrap of conversation between her

father and mother showed that Joe's secret was guessed by others.

"Margaret is years older than Joe in wisdom and experience," Mother said.

"I must own he has good taste," Father replied.

"I am sorry for the boy," Mother added.

"It won't hurt him a bit, Kitty," Father insisted heartlessly. "He isn't half so badly hurt as he thinks he is. Don't you coddle him."

What Father meant by "coddling" was not clear. He was himself most attentive to Joe in these days, while Mother carefully considered his taste in the matter of things to eat.

As for the young man himself, as he went about his preparations he was not sunk in as hopeless a melancholy as might have been expected. It took much to down completely Joe's buoyant spirit.

CHAPTER XXX

“LOOK IN A BOOK”

The old gray parrot winked an eye,
As queer as queer could be,
“Look in a book,—look in a book.
You’ll find it,”—thus spake he.

WHAT a quiet household it would be with just Mother and Father and Susan! As the time for Joe’s departure drew near they began to realize how much his cheery ways and light-hearted presence meant in their small family. Joe said he would think of them each evening sitting with their backs to the light around the dining-room table, Mother with her crocheting, Father lost in his paper, and Susan in a book. “However,” he added, “Susan Hermione is getting to be quite a conversationalist.”

“There will be nobody to call me Susan Hermione now,” exclaimed the owner of the nickname with a sigh, forgetting how she used to dislike it.

“I am not going out of the world just yet,”

replied her brother. "I shall write occasionally."

"Joe, don't you dare to put Susan Hermione on a letter. Mother, tell him not to," cried Susan.

"What shall I do with those old law books?" Mother wanted to know. "They are on the shelf in your closet. Would it not be a good idea to take them to Self and Son's? You won't get anything for them, but I shall not have to take care of them and see that they are dusted."

So this was the end of Joe's bright dream of reading law in secret and surprising Father. Though neither mentioned it, both he and Susan thought of it on their way to the second-hand book shop. When it was possible Susan kept pretty close to Joe in these days.

The parrot to-day was unusually energetic. He had been showing his age of late, but now he swung head down from the roof of his cage and exhorted them to look in a book, in a perfect frenzy of earnestness.

"Well, Polly, we'll look if you will just keep still," said Susan, laughing. "You might have left some papers in them, Joe."

“I guess not,” Joe replied, but he fluttered the leaves of the volume he had just laid down, and turning it over, hit it smartly against the edge of the counter. A narrow slip of folded paper fell out as he did so. Susan picked it up.

It was very thin paper and had been folded and creased again and again, as such a bit of paper is often treated in absence of mind. “It is nothing,” said Joe. “Just a marker.” But Susan began unfolding it.

“There is some writing on it,” she answered. “See! ‘Received of’—oh, Joe, look!—‘Henry Kennedy,’ and down at the bottom— isn’t it—”

Joe took the paper from her hand. “‘Anne Carrol.’ Susan, I believe this must be that lost receipt, but to be absolutely certain, I am going to take it to the bank and have Mrs. Carrol’s signature verified.”

Half an hour later Joe and Susan were mounting the steps at the Brocade Lady’s.

“Do you want me to go?” Susan had asked.

“Why, of course, Hermie. If it had not been for you, I should not have found it at all.”

“It wasn’t I, it was Polly,” she said, laughing. “Won’t Miss Margaret be glad!”

“Think of its having been on my table all last winter!” added her brother.

At the sound of Margaret’s descending footsteps as they waited in the sitting-room, Joe held the paper out to Susan. “You give it to her,” he said.

Susan put her hands behind her back, and shook her head. On the way Joe had thought of a number of appropriate things to say, but now he forgot them all and was strangely embarrassed, for him. Margaret looked from him to Susan in surprise, stopping short in the midst of her greeting.

“I—we—have brought you something,” Joe stammered, handing her the paper. “It’s all right. I took it to the bank.”

Margaret took the paper and looked at it, and then up at Joe. “It—you don’t mean?—it can’t be—” The color all left her face, and she sat down in the nearest chair. The hand that held the receipt trembled.

“Yes, Margaret, it is—the lost receipt. Tell her, Susan. We found it, Susan and I. I took it to the bank. It is all right.”

Margaret looked at the paper again. “I can’t read it,” she said helplessly, “but you wouldn’t tell me what was not so.”

“No, Peggy, you know I wouldn’t,” said Joe, and he looked very big and manly standing beside her. “This is my parting gift to my old friend, and if I had been of any account I should have found it long ago.”

It was all made clear at length. Margaret’s color began to return, and she pressed Susan’s hand and smiled at her. “Forgive me for being so silly,—but I have waited so long, it is hard to believe it has come at last,—and Joe found it,” she repeated, smiling up at him. “How can I ever thank you? How often I have seen my father fold a bit of paper in this way as he talked,” she added.

“I owe you far more than you owe me,” Joe told her. “But I can’t tell you how glad I am that I was the one to find it. Good-by, Peggy. I mean to be worthy of your friendship.”

Margaret’s eyes were full of tears. “Good-by, dear, dear Joe,” she said.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE BROCADE LADY'S SON

Be it late, or be it soon,
Patient waiting wins its boon.

"Do you remember last Christmas Eve, Susan, and how much fun we had with Mr. Joe?" asked Holliday.

"Don't I?" sighed Susan. "I miss him dreadfully, but we have such nice letters from him. He wants Mother and me to come out to see him next summer."

Browinski's windows, which they were passing, were as alluring as ever. Times might be hard, but there was little evidence of it around Browinski's at Christmas. Sophy Idelle stood in the door and ran out to speak to them. She went to a convent school in Baltimore now, and her manner was patronizing, as of one who enjoyed a wider experience.

"Sophy Idelle looks more like Julius Cæsar than ever," Holliday remarked. "I wonder if Colonel Brand is coming home for Christmas?" she added as they approached his house.

"Will you ever forget that queer man we saw there last year?" Susan was saying, when a cab passed them and stopped before the gate.

"There he is now," answered Holliday, meaning the colonel, but who was the person who followed him from the carriage? "Susan!" she exclaimed, under her breath.

Susan in her turn exclaimed, "Holliday!" for there before their eyes was that same dark man in the same queer cloak.

"There is some mystery about him, Susan, mark my words," Holliday said impressively.

The front door closed behind the colonel and his guest, leaving the mystery unsolved for the present, and the girls had to separate at the corner, as Holliday's aunt wanted her at home. Susan was going on to the Brocade Lady's.

Miss Margaret was fastening a wreath in the sitting-room window. "I am so glad to see you," she said. "The Brocade Lady has gone to the orphanage for the afternoon and I am decorating in her absence."

The pleasant odor of pine pervaded the place, and on the table stood a little tree in a pot. "You can help me trim this," she said.

Susan was happy to help, and they were

having a charming time over it and she was in the midst of telling about the man she and Holliday had seen, both last Christmas Eve and this, when Colonel Brand was shown in.

It was clear from his manner that something unusual had occurred. He seemed almost excited. Margaret's first thought was that something had happened to the Brocade Lady; but no, he had come to see her, it seemed. He shook hands with them both and sat down.

"I am going to surprise the Brocade Lady with a Christmas tree," Margaret explained.

"Yes?" he responded, in an absent way. Then he added, "I, too, have a surprise for her."

Margaret dropped the little silver ornament she held, and looked at him with wide-open eyes.

Colonel Brand stooped and picked it up. "You knew, I suppose, that she has a son?"

"Yes,—only recently. Has he—"

"He has come back to her at last."

"Is he here?" Margaret glanced at the door.

"He is with me,—at my house. It seemed best to prepare his mother, after such a long waiting."

“And is he—will she be happier now he is found?” Margaret asked.

“Would not anything be better than this long-continued waiting? It is true,” he continued, “that he is much broken in health. He has led a strange, roving life, for the most part in the far East, part of the time acting as war correspondent for an English paper. He was once severely wounded, and suffers acutely at times as a result.”

“But why has he stayed away all these years?” Margaret’s voice was full of reproach for this unknown man.

“When the spirit of wandering possesses a man, there is no accounting for him,” the colonel replied. “And when a high-spirited, sensitive boy is turned from his father’s house for a piece of childish folly which most parents would overlook entirely, you can scarcely wonder at his vow never to return.”

“I knew nothing of that,” said Margaret.

“Yes, his father was unthinkably harsh with his only son. I have an idea that our friend came back here to live, chiefly for the reason that there would be nothing to remind her son of his unhappy boyhood whenever he should

return, as she always believed that he would."

"And you found him and brought him home?" asked Margaret.

"That," the colonel replied, "is rather a long story. I got on his track some years ago, and finally stumbled upon him by chance in Egypt. I prevailed upon him to return to this country with me. We had been friends in our boyhood and I have a certain influence over him. I was called away by important business, a year ago, and he came out here and actually stayed in my house like a hermit for a week, then suddenly disappeared. An outbreak of the old trouble caused by his wound brought on an attack of extreme depression. He found himself unwilling to go to his mother, empty handed and a wreck, as he put it, so he ran away. I only heard of him again last month."

"Are you certain he will not run away again?"

"I think so. He has lately been making a collection of poems which for years have appeared here, there, and everywhere, and he is as pleased as a child over the little book, which he has dedicated to his mother."

Susan listened to all this with eager interest.

So here was the explanation of the stranger they had seen entering the colonel's house.

"What a friend you have been!" Miss Margaret said, as Colonel Brand rose.

He looked embarrassed, and murmured, "Not at all."

"I think so, too," said Susan. "To us all,—to the Brocade Lady and to Joe, and to the Selfs."

"Oh, the Selfs," said he, laughing. "I hear they are about to bring suit against me. Some one has been persuading them that I am taking advantage of them."

Miss Margaret was highly indignant at this. The colonel must have been gratified at the warmth with which she expressed herself.

"I wonder if anything more will happen this year," Susan said, at the tea-table.

"Only a week left," Father remarked.

"A good deal can happen in a week," Mother added.

"But there isn't anything left to happen," laughed Susan.

To Susan and Holliday the Brocade Lady's son seemed a melancholy figure, when they peeped at him through the sitting-room door

on their way up to Miss Margaret. A masculine presence at the Brocade Lady's was odd of itself, and the sight of newspapers strewn over the floor still more strange.

It was impossible not to feel that it would have been more satisfactory if the Brocade Lady's son had come back a strong, successful man to take care of her for the rest of her days, instead of a semi-invalid for her to nurse, but she did not regard it so. He was the son she had longed for all these years, and to have him in a measure dependent on her care added, if anything, to her joy. Her pleasure in the little volume of poems he brought her was good to see.

This strange, foreign-looking son of hers was much discussed in these days, and Colonel Brand, when he was by, was his staunch friend. The colonel's stiffness was actually giving way to something like geniality.

In spite of the hard times and Joe's absence, this was a happy Christmas. None of her gifts pleased Susan more than a small book from Dick Seymour, "Selections from Wordsworth's Poems," with a little marker between the leaves at Elsie's verse.

"I think Dick is a very nice boy," was Holiday's comment.

Mother thought it showed singular taste for a boy, but she did not know about Elsie's verse.

And after all, as an extract from the red diary will show, there was still something left to happen in the week that remained of this year.

CHAPTER XXXII

FROM THE RED DIARY

The fire grows cold,
The year is old
The story's told.
On fleetest wings
A new year brings
New happenings.

WHEN I began this diary, Joe said I wouldn't have any adventures to write down in it, and I thought myself, perhaps, I shouldn't; but I have had a good many, and now on the few pages that are left I have two more exciting things to tell.

To-morrow is New Year's Day, and I have a new diary to begin, and so has Holliday. We are going to write down a beautiful thought every day, if nothing else.

The first exciting thing is about the discovery of the secret of the Christmas tree. Anybody might have found it out if Colonel Brand had used the room and left the shutters open as the Brocade Lady wanted him to. The person who really discovered it is Professor De-Witt, a friend of Mr. Heywood's, who has been

visiting him. Holliday says he is a scientist, and is writing a book with a queer name she couldn't remember.

The other night I went there to dinner, and Miss Margaret was there, too. At the table Mr. Heywood told Professor DeWitt about the phantom Christmas tree. You might have expected him to say "Nonsense," but he didn't, but asked a great many questions. Holliday told him the story of the children getting burned and how their mother lost her mind, and he was very much interested.

Mr. Heywood laughed and wanted to know if he believed in ghosts? The professor said it depended upon what you meant by ghosts, and that here was just the soil in which they grew, and he asked if it would be possible to investigate?

After dinner who should come in to call but Colonel Brand, and Mr. Heywood told him Professor DeWitt wanted to see his tree. You could see he didn't like it, but he was very polite. The professor said it might serve as an illustration for his book. So the Heywoods' man was sent over to tell them to open the shutters of the east parlor.

The colonel said he knew it was all imagination, growing out of idle servants' gossip. He had seen the tree for a minute once himself, so he thought, but when he came to his senses and looked again, it wasn't there.

Holliday and I watched and were dreadfully afraid there would not be anything to see. We had seen it once and we were sure it wasn't imagination. Well, the shutters were opened, and sure enough, there was the tree. Everybody saw it, the colonel, Aunt Nan, Miss Margaret, and all.

Professor DeWitt looked a long time, then he said it was a most interesting illusion, and he was asking if he might go home with the colonel and try an experiment, when suddenly the electric street light, which hangs almost in front of Christmas Tree House, went out. It goes out very often. And when *it* went out the *tree* went out too! It was the reflection of the electric light in the window panes!

The windows of Christmas Tree House are old-fashioned, with six panes in each sash, and the colonel said he had noticed that the glass in that window was not plate like the rest, but very poor. The window had been broken in

a storm a few years ago and Mrs. Carrol had the poor glass put in. The Brocade Lady remembered that.

The professor said it was an unusually perfect illusion, for when the light came back, though we knew there wasn't a tree there really, we still saw it, all lighted and hung with colored ornaments.

He said it was a remarkable coincidence that it fitted in with the sad story of the house. The street light hasn't been there very long, and the house was kept shut up most of the time, so the tree was only seen occasionally, and in a way that made it seem supernatural.

Miss Margaret said she thought it was a terrible come-down, but the professor said he was going to put it in his book.

I wonder if Mammy Ria will believe it. I told Silvy, and she just tossed her head.

The last thing I have to put down is the most exciting of all, besides being a great secret between Holliday and me. It happened this afternoon. Holliday came around and asked me if I didn't want to visit the Wise Man's grave for the last time, and of course I did.

They have decided to alter the church; so

we can't have our class there any longer. Mrs. Boone is going to let us have a room on the back of her lot, that was once used as a studio by her son. She is fixing it up beautifully, but Lily calls it having school in the stable.

At the church they were having some sort of a meeting in the chapel, and upstairs the organist was playing. In our schoolroom Miss Margaret was packing up some of her books. Since that receipt was found, Miss Margaret has looked so happy!

Holliday and I sat in the window and talked about all that had happened since we had been friends. She said she thought our friendship was founded on a rock, and I think it is a very nice idea, for it has stood some storms. Then she said, "Let's write to Dick." So we went into Mr. Bright's study and borrowed some paper. Miss Margaret had gone, but there were pens and ink on her table, still.

We sat and wrote a long time, and the organ kept on sounding, now loud, now soft. Holliday pulled a screen that Miss Margaret sometimes uses, in front of us, so no one would see us if they chanced to look in, and this made it happen just like a story.

Suddenly the music stopped, and we heard low voices talking. I peeped around the screen, and there were Miss Margaret and Colonel Brand standing by the grave of the Wise Man. She had the loveliest color in her face and he looked radiant, Holliday said.

"Are you sure you have forgiven me?" he asked, and she turned and held out both hands to him, with the dearest smile.

Of course we came to our senses then and didn't look any more, but just hugged each other, and the music began again like everything.

We were simply afraid to breathe, but after a while, when the music grew quiet, Holliday peeped and they had gone. We were so afraid we might meet them that we went through the Sunday School room and upstairs and out by the church door.

I never once thought of Miss Margaret's marrying the colonel. I was sure it would be either Joe or Mr. Bright. The sad thing is that if she marries Colonel Brand she won't teach us any more.

And now, my dear Diary, it is a year and three months since I wrote down my wish on

your first page, and there isn't room for another word. It is almost midnight, the whistles are beginning to blow and the bells to ring, which means that a new year is coming in.

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